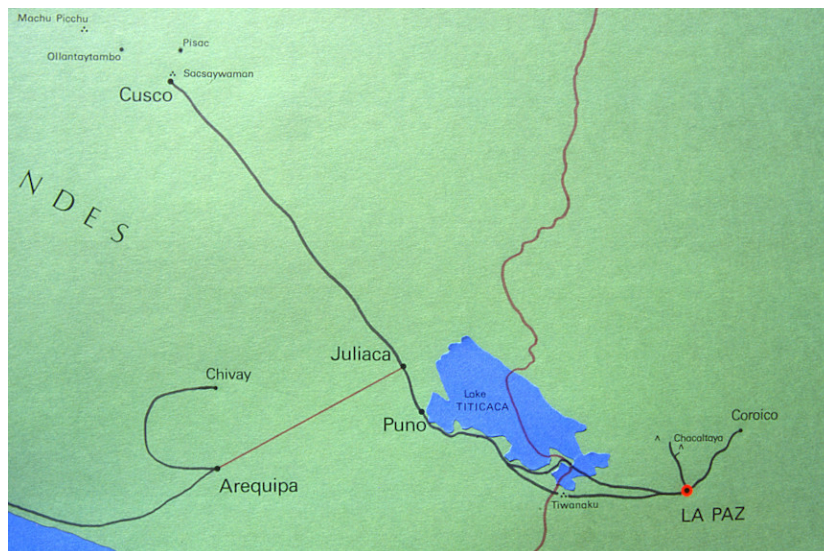


## 5 – TO CUSCO

Tuesday, 14 May continued

Once we had crossed the border, we put our watches back one hour, piled into a small Japanese minibus and set off for Puno. As I felt quite unwell by now, the three-hour journey was something of an ordeal; I thought that we would never reach the town and our hotel. When we finally arrived, Marianne gave us a talk about the next few days, after which I received the key to our room. I lay down for a while, feeling miserable. The room was cold and the décor was stark. It was at moments like these when all I wanted to do was to pack up and go home! After a while I sat up in bed and brought my diary up to date. Later I ventured out, despite having a slight stomach cramp, and walked to the nearby market, where I bought some bread, biscuits, water, and a bottle of lemonade. After spending a little time in the main square I returned to the hotel, where I rested then dined on biscuits, for that was all that I could stomach at the moment. I retired to bed early and slept like a log.



Wednesday, 15 May

I woke shortly after six o'clock, feeling a little better. We met in the hotel lobby shortly before seven and walked the short distance to the railway station. We entered via a side gate and were brought to our carriage, which was quite plush inside. I was expecting that we would share a carriage with the local people and their chickens, as described in our brochure, but we had been given a second-class carriage. There was just one problem: there was not enough space for our luggage.

At about 7.30 we moved off and started our long journey to our final destination: Cuzco (now spelt Cusco). This was the place that I most wanted to see. We chugged along very slowly to our first stop, Juliaca. For breakfast I ate some of the bread and

biscuits that I had bought during the previous evening. We finally ground to a halt at Juliaca and, while more carriages were added to the train, we stepped out into the sunshine and were bombarded by local people trying to sell us alpaca jumpers and souvenirs. We were expecting a long delay here, but fortunately we were off again shortly afterwards.



*A vendor at Juliaca train station and a view from the train*

We now travelled at a quicker speed across the wide Altiplano, stopping now and then at various stations. Although the scenery was pleasant, it was not particularly dramatic. We passed fields, farms, groups of colourfully-dressed women at work, and various animals such as llamas, alpacas, sheep, and cows. Most of the small towns had concrete buildings with corrugated iron roofs, complete with peeling paint and ugly graffiti, though most of the farm buildings were of traditional adobe bricks and had thatched roofs, blending far better with the surrounding landscape.

At first I sat and chatted with Philip, Hugh and Philippa, but later I dozed for a while. I then joined the Irish girls and Louisa for a game of Scrabble. This put in the time very well. After a couple of games we stopped for lunch. A set meal was available, but I just ate more bread and biscuits, plus some chocolate. By now I was feeling much better.

We whiled away the afternoon playing more Scrabble, chatting and standing at the end of the carriage admiring the view. During the middle of the afternoon the scenery became more varied and interesting when mountains appeared; a few of them were snow-capped. Later our surroundings became more lush when trees, green mountains and more cultivated fields appeared. Now and then we passed some very pretty spots. This was what I had imagined the Andes to look like. Now and then we slowed down when approaching a station and then, when we stopped, we got off in order to stretch our legs.

Eventually, after yet another game of Scrabble, it became dark. I got up and went to the end of the carriage and spent some time with my head stuck out of a window, watching the majestic scenery float past. The lights had been turned on in the first class carriage, but not in ours, though eventually ours were switched on. As there

was no more scenery to be seen from the window, the rest of the journey soon became tedious. I read for a while, dozed off, then ate my last piece of bread.

We finally arrived in Cusco soon after 8.30 p.m. It had been a very long journey. A bus took us through the interesting main square and uphill to a most unusual and old-world hotel: the Hostal Corihuasi. (I later discovered that the word 'Corihuasi' was the Quechua word for 'gold house'.) The dining room overlooked a spectacular panoramic view of the illuminated city, with the main square clearly visible. To get to our rooms, Philip, Bruce, Cameron and I had to walk up steps, along a veranda (which offered the same fantastic view), down some more steps, then round a corner to another part of the building. Our bedrooms, separated by one bathroom, were constructed in the same rough, old-world style as the entrance of the hotel, with exposed wooden beams under the ceilings.

After the lads had spruced themselves up, they went out with Chris, Graham and our guide Marianne for a drink. I went to the dining room, where I ordered a small pizza and a pot of tea. While waiting for the meal, I wrote more of my diary. Afterwards, I continued writing in my room and, after I finished, had a very welcome hot shower. I finally went to bed and read a few pages of a book about Cusco that I had found in the dining room.

Thursday, 16 May

Having slept very well, I woke at around six o'clock to the sound of a dog barking. Church bells began to ring half an hour later. I rose shortly afterwards, washed, shaved and dressed. I crept out of the bedroom at about seven and went outside, where I was greeted by the magnificent sight of Cusco bathed in early morning sunshine. Of all the cities that we had visited so far, this was certainly the most elegant. Most of the buildings here were constructed in the Spanish style and had proper slate roofs instead of the ugly corrugated ones that we had been seeing everywhere. The city before me was nestled between mountains, the contours of which were now emphasized by the low, early morning sunlight.

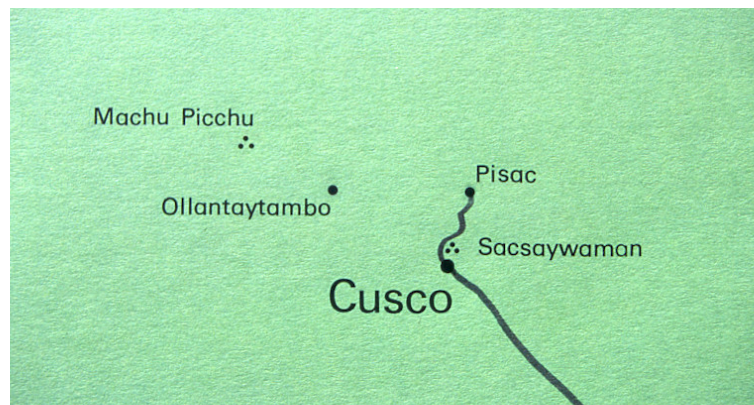


*View of Cusco*



A little later I joined my fellow travellers for a simple breakfast of juice, bread and jam, then tea or coffee. Afterwards I had a closer look at the interesting dining room, which contained some religious pictures painted in the local style. Soon after eight o'clock we prepared to leave for today's tour of the Sacred Valley of the Incas. However, there was a considerable delay because of the late arrival of some money changers whom Marianne had organized for the trekkers. We finally set off at about 8.30.

We now drove out of Cusco and up to some fine mountain scenery, which was very lush and dramatic. Because of the rains here during the summer, the land was very fertile. Everybody in the bus was captivated by the views on both sides. A short distance out of Cusco were the Inca ruins of Sacsayhuaman, which we were able to see from the road.



*The Urubamba river near Pisac*

Soon we reached our highest point and found ourselves looking down over the Urubamba river – a river that I had often read about. We stopped a couple of times in order to take photos. I would have loved to have stopped dozens of times, for there were so many excellent views to be photographed: dramatic mountains, trees (some of which had a bluish tinge), traditional farms and farmhouses, fields, and colourfully-dressed women tending to their animals or working in the fields. The fields had various different colours, the most striking of which were the rusty red

ones. These ones were fields of quinoa, a variety of high-protein millet that we had often found in soups that were served to us. It was also used in the production of alcoholic drinks. Chris told me that he grew the crop for pheasants on his land in Yorkshire.



*Fields, and an aerial view of Pisac*

At our last photo stop we were able to look down over Pisac: both the modern town, which was situated at the bottom of a valley, and the ancient Inca town, which was perched on the side of a mountain. The view was quite spectacular. We now dropped down into the valley, drove through the pleasing and atmospheric streets of the modern town, then wound our way up the mountain towards the old town, where we stopped. Then, following an ancient Inca pathway, we walked to the ruins. The views looking down into the valley where the Urumbamba river flowed were breathtakingly beautiful and we dawdled here, spellbound. Because of our reluctance to leave promptly, Marianne became worried that our day-long tour would take too long and that we would be late arriving back in Cusco. Our guide stopped every so often to explain points of interest to us. Although he was very knowledgeable, he tended to be a little impersonal. I was delighted to explore our first Inca ruins in this region; we were now able to see examples of fine stonework



and some typical gateways. Although the steps that we used to climb upwards and downwards were rough and broken in parts, they were of sound construction. We were also able to see some superb Inca terracing beneath us. I stopped many times to photograph the views.



*Inca buildings in the Intiwatana, Pisac*

After a while we drove down to the Intiwatana, which was some type of ceremonial complex. Unfortunately the experts were not altogether clear about the purpose of the site, though what might have been a sundial was visible at one point. It was thought that the place served as a residence for an Inca governor. Our guide pointed out some of the finer points of the architecture.

We finally tore ourselves away from the site and walked back to the bus. We now encountered lots of tourists coming in the opposite direction. Here and there along the pathway were locals selling reproductions of ancient Inca musical instruments, such as ocarinas, and near the tourist coaches were some colourfully-dressed women who were willing to be photographed for 1 s/.



*Women in traditional dress, Pisac*

When we were all back in the coach, we drove down to the market place in Pisac and spent about an hour pottering around. I finally succumbed and bought a few things: a couple of jumpers, one of which I planned to give to my mother, and a set of panpipes for myself.

We then drove through the fine valley, following the course of the Urubamba river. We stopped in the village of Calca and entered a restaurant, where we were able to enjoy a cheap and cheerful lunch in the welcome shade. There were birds wandering around the garden and more in cages; they included a parrot, several budgies, a quail, and a large unfamiliar bird that came from the jungle and had a long name that I could not remember.



*Ollantaytambo, near Pisac*

After a leisurely meal we boarded the coach once again and continued driving along the valley, which was much bigger than I had imagined. Once again we passed some charming scenery and magnificent mountains, but this time the road followed



the river and railway line to Machu Picchu. We passed through the villages of Yucay and Urubamba, finally arriving at the small town of Ollantaytambo. This contained a maze of charming alleyways containing houses and tiny shops, the lower portions of which consisted of original Inca stone walls. The streets of the town followed the original Inca layout, and even the fields nearby were based on the Inca landmarks. I took some photos of this wonderful little place, which was made all the more charming by the light of the late afternoon sunshine.



*Inca ruins at Ollantaytambo, near Pisac*

After we had ambled around, we assembled in the main square, boarded the bus and were driven to some nearby Inca ruins. This massive structure, consisting of tiers of stonework rising up the side of a mountain, looked vaguely cold and impersonal (though impressive nonetheless) in the shade. Following our guide, we joined dozens of other tourists and scrambled up the stone steps until we were almost at the top of the complex. From here we could see the remains of Inca storerooms for grain and other commodities on the side of a mountain opposite. When everybody was together, our guide brought us to see the nearby Temple of the Sun, which had never been completed. We now rounded a corner and looked straight down into the deep valley, with Ollantaytambo far below us; it was a breathtaking view.

From our new vantage point, the highest here, our guide told us more about the place. We learned that 'Ollanta' referred to an Inca warrior who gained control of the area for the empire, and 'Tambo' referred to the town's subsequent use as a storehouse of public provisions and goods. The place later served as a fortress during a failed rebellion of Manco Inca II against the Spanish. From here we could see some examples of pre-Inca masonry. We were told that the workers had been moved down to settlements at the base of the mountain (now the modern town and some nearby ruins), whereas the nobility and priests had lived in the complex up where we were. It was a massive achievement, but many of the buildings had not been completed due to the arrival of the Spaniards.

As it was cool here in the shade, we were glad to go downhill and clamber aboard the bus. We now drove back the way that we had come and then, at Urubamba, crossed the river and headed back to Cusco via Chinchero. We climbed out of the



valley and drove across a beautiful rolling landscape, parts of which bore a resemblance to the scenery in County Wicklow. However, here and there we were able to see snow-capped mountains in the distance. At one point a magnificent snowy peak dominated the view. Once again I wished that we could have made several stops to drink in these magnificent views and take photos, although by now the light was beginning to fade. Slowly but surely, as we continued our journey via Chinchero, which we really could not see, it became dark and stars began to twinkle. By the time we finally arrived back in Cusco, the sky was pitch black.

In the hotel, those who had opted for the Inca trail trek, which would start the following morning, did their packing, and I took a shower. The trekkers were given a talk about the route at seven o'clock and then, at a quarter to eight, we all assembled to meet Marianne and walked with her via the fine main square (the Plaza de Armas) to a very pleasant restaurant. Here the menus were framed pictures of the dishes, with their names in Spanish and other languages, including English. This made ordering relatively simple – it was a very good idea. I ordered what Marianne recommended: trout in a spicy cream sauce with rice. It was very good.

Most members of our group left early and returned to the hotel as there would be a 6.30 start on the following morning. As I was in no great hurry, I stayed on with Marianne and the lads. Afterwards we adjourned to a bar for a quick drink; in it could be heard deafeningly loud disco music. I did not dare sit anywhere near the dance floor, but remained in the bar with Graham and Chris, where it was a little quieter. At last we left and walked back to our hotel. It did not take me long to fall asleep. It had been a very enjoyable day.

Friday, 17 May

This morning I was woken by the lads having showers and then leaving at about 6 a.m. While all this was happening I sat up in bed, writing my diary, then went back to sleep. I woke again at about eight o'clock. After breakfast with the Danes we met Marianne at about nine o'clock. She chatted to us for an hour, telling us about Cusco and what was worth seeing, then left. We were now free to spend the day as we liked.



*The Plaza de Armas, Cusco*



*The Plaza de Armas, Cusco*

Armed with a map and my camera, I wandered down to the main square, where I took some photos of the churches and colonnades that were bathed in the bright morning sunshine. Turning down a narrow street by the side of the large cathedral, I found my way to the Museo Santa Catalina, where there was a magnificent church; I went inside to take a look at it. There was also a convent, though it was not open to the public. However, one could buy sweetmeats from the nuns, who pushed them through a hatch to the purchaser. The little museum was open, and I gained entry using a \$10 ticket that I had bought on the previous day. It proved to be quite interesting and contained many religious pictures painted by anonymous local artists. Although some of them were rather naïve in style, others were more sophisticated and had been confidently executed. There were many depictions of the Virgin Mary, most of which showed her dressed in elaborate triangular-shaped robes glistening with silver or gold. However, the most notable feature of this museum was the gaily and humorously-painted chapel; domestic scenes had been depicted in bands under the main religious paintings. One scene was of musicians playing lutes and other instruments of the period.

In a glass case upstairs was a large, open wooden box in which could be seen an incredibly detailed tableau of religious and secular events consisting of miniature carved figurines. The centrepiece featured a rather large baby Jesus surrounded by angels, an assortment of people mentioned in the Bible, and noblemen of the seventeenth century. Although the craftsmanship was a little rough, the detail was quite astonishing.

After a leisurely tour of the museum, I left and walked along some busy streets to the Qorikancha or Temple of the Sun, now the Convent of San Domingo. This Qorikancha ('circular area of gold') had been the most celebrated temple in the empire of the Incas, for they had believed that it was the dwelling place of the gods and spirits of their religion. What I now witnessed was an extraordinary mixture of Inca and Spanish stonework, both of which were extremely impressive. I noticed that one whole corner of the structure consisted of large Inca blocks of stone.



*The Qorikancha, now the Convent of San Domingo, Cusco*

Inside I admired the impressive cloisters, the Inca walls and stonework adjoining them (a most curious mixture), one of the paintings in the cloisters, and part of the magnificent ceiling. A guide offered to explain everything, but as a young American couple refused her services, I joined them and listened to the young lady reading aloud from her guidebook. The various Inca halls dedicated to the sun, the moon, Venus, the stars, thunder, lightning, and the rainbow, had once been lavishly decorated with ornaments made of precious metals, all of which had been looted by the Spaniards. The chapel of the sun had been entirely decorated with gold. The chapel of the moon had once contained the mummies of Inca women adorned with silver. An earthquake in 1950 had seriously damaged the Spanish superstructure, but the Inca remains had not been affected.

After I had looked around here, I left and made my way back to the main square along some noisy streets, though I got a little lost due to my poor map. I ambled around the square in the shade of the colonnades and paid a visit to a fine Jesuit church near the cathedral, where a Mass was being said. There was no end to beautiful churches in this country! I then walked to a smaller and prettier square nearby, where I visited the Regional Museum. This contained examples of the



various types of ceramics pertaining to the diverse ancient cultures of the country, a little bit of delicate goldware found locally, religious art, and furniture. Although everything was interesting, it was not unduly spectacular. I was very taken with the pretty courtyard and its balconies.

On my way back to the main square, I stopped to buy postcards and stamps, and nearly ran out of money in doing so. I then met the Danes and had lunch with them in the restaurant where we had dined on the previous evening. It was delightful to sit down and rest for a while! We ordered stuffed avocado; mine contained chicken and was quite tasty.

We parted company afterwards; I bought some stamps for a friend, then went across the square to the large early seventeenth-century cathedral that had been built on the site of the Inca Palace of Viracocha. I joined crowds of tourists who were queueing to get in and wandered around the dark interior, admiring the amazing side altars, the high altar made of solid silver, the wonderful carvings done by native craftsmen on the original wooden *retablo* behind it, the elaborate pulpit, and the baroque choir stalls. I was intrigued by a crude depiction and description of an earthquake that had damaged the city at one time in its history. No doubt I should have followed Marianne's advice to avail of one of the many guides, but today I was enjoying the freedom of being on my own and seeing things at my own speed. However, because of this, I missed a painting of the Last Supper in which local delicacies, including guinea pig, were depicted. I met the Danes again briefly in the cathedral.



*A street near the cathedral, Cusco*

Following their advice, I left and walked up a narrow street of Inca origin to the left of the cathedral (where one could see the Inca stonework at the base of the walls) and arrived at a small square that contained a couple of fountains. I stopped here to take a photo of the surrounding rooftops and the main square beyond. I then continued to another square, which I considered to be the prettiest here in Cusco, if not in all of Peru. There was an exclusive feel about the square and I noticed a couple of armed policeman keeping an eye on it. In the centre was a small garden full of colourful flowers. I quickly brushed my hair and walked over to the

Monasterio de Nazarenas, now a very exclusive hotel, which the Danes had advised me to visit. A uniformed young man opened the tinted glass door for me and I asked if I could see inside.

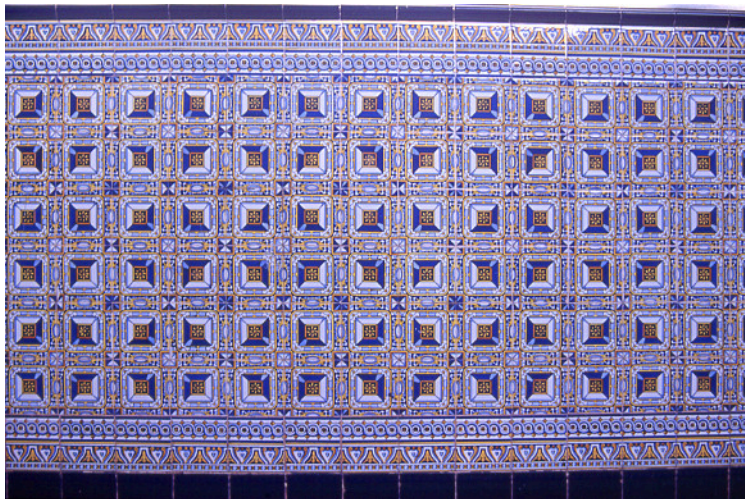


*The Monasterio de Nazarenas and its cloisters, Cusco*

He admitted me and very kindly showed me around, explaining everything in Spanish. I managed to get the gist of most of what he was telling me. His English, like my Spanish, was rather limited. He showed me the magnificent main cloisters, the first of their kind in Peru, from where I admired a pretty garden and a deliciously cool fountain in the courtyard, then a wonderful and richly-decorated chapel where I gazed at important religious paintings, elaborate decorations fashioned in silver that had been taken from the unfortunate Incas, and a couple of grand pianos on which two musicians had been playing classical music this morning. I was told that people ('well heeled', no doubt) often came here to be married. Everything here was done in the very best of taste.

I was then led to the secondary cloisters, off which the bedrooms were situated. Glass panels had been placed between the columns and arches of the cloisters. My guide rattled off all the facilities that the guests could avail of, then conducted me

back to the main cloisters, where he invited me to take a photo of the fountain, which now looked superb against the light from where we stood. From here he brought me to the guests' sitting room, where there were comfortable armchairs and old paintings on the walls, then finally back to the entrance. I thanked the young man, pushed a few small coins into his hand, and left.



*The cloisters of the Museo del Arte Religioso and a wall adorned with azulejos, Cusco*

From here I made my way down a steep street (known to the Incas as Tocoachi) and went into the small Museo del Arte Religioso, formerly the Archbishop's Palace. A very polite elderly gentleman greeted me in both Spanish and English and clipped my ticket. Before he had a chance to tell me which way to go, I asked him if I could take a photograph of the beautiful cloisters and central courtyard, now bathed in the warm glow of the afternoon sun. The gentleman granted my wish, though I was not allowed to enter the cloisters.

Once I had taken my photograph, I began to take a look at the various items of religious art on display; it was immediately obvious that everything here was of a very high standard indeed. After visiting a couple of the rooms, I stopped to photograph some of the beautiful blue and white tiles in the cloisters. The old gentleman came to me again and explained, in Spanish, that they were called



*azulejos* and that there was a lot of Moorish influence in their design. I noticed that the elegant doors here were made of delicately carved wood. Having admired my camera and lenses, the man then asked me where I was from. I told him that I was from Dublin and explained, as best as I could, that we had many elegant houses built in the Italian style in Ireland. I also asked him where I might find the seventeenth-century paintings of a Corpus Christi procession depicted by the Indian artist Diego Quispe Tito, and was told by him that they were at present being exhibited in Rome.

I continued my tour of the rooms and entered a tiny private chapel that was exquisite inside. Although I was quite satiated by religious art and antiquities by now, I was greatly enjoying visiting this museum because of its utterly charming atmosphere. Another room, with elaborate panelling and a fine ceiling now caught my fancy; in it were more wonderful paintings and magnificent old furniture.

At this point I bumped into a girl whom I had seen earlier and who, like me, was enchanted by this magical place. We fell into conversation and I learnt that her name was Nathalie, and that she hailed from Canada. As she normally spoke French, she apologized for her rusty English, though she told me that she had excellent Spanish. She was touring around South America on her own, having taken a long break from work, and had just spent a month in Bolivia. She had arrived in Cusco just this morning. As she was a very pleasant and interesting young lady, I asked her if she had made plans for this evening, but as she had, she invited me to join her for a cup of tea.

We therefore left the museum, made our way down to the main square and found a café that Marianne had recommended: a rather nondescript place named Ayllu. Here we drank cups of *maté de coca* to the accompaniment of Georghe Zamfir playing some Romanian music that was familiar to me. We had quite a long and pleasant chat about all kinds of things and afterwards I brought her to the hotel where I was staying, so that she could see the magnificent view from the dining room. She was suitably impressed by the view and the room. We chatted for another while until she finally excused herself and left. We made a very vague arrangement to meet again on the following evening but, as she was uncertain about her plans, I had a hunch that I would not see her again. I was genuinely sorry to see her depart; she was like a breath of fresh air.

I now organized a few things, changed into better clothes, wrote a little of my diary, joined some of my companions and met Marianne at 7.30 p.m. We walked to a nearby street and entered a rather rough-and-ready pizzeria, where we ordered food that turned out to be quite good. I tackled a large 'special' pizza, which I just about managed to eat with the exception of one slice; I was allowed to take it away with me. We travelled back to the hotel by taxi as walking around Cusco at night-time was not considered to be safe. As I was tired by now, I went straight to bed. It was great having the room to myself for a couple of nights!