



From June 5 to 16, five people took on the challenge of the *Lares* high-altitude trek in Peru. Nadia Loignon, Louise Giasson, Josée Ricard, Noémie Lespérance-Hudon and Denise Poirier have been able to experience the magnificence and diversity of Peru by way of an 11-day adventure through breathtaking landscapes, hiking, cultural sightseeing and local cuisine.

Financial Challenge

As this was a charity trip for the benefit of IRIS Mundial, the participants' challenges began well before their departure. Indeed, in addition to paying their own trip & expenses, they worked tirelessly from July 2017 to June 2018 to raise a minimum of \$4,500 per person for IRIS Mundial through sponsorships, company donations, solicitations in their personal network, online donations, fundraising activities, etc. The money raised will help to support the IRIS Mundial mission: To improve the ocular health of the vulnerable in developing countries! Thus, many people will benefit from a better access to high-quality preventive and curative eye care services—enabling them to improve their living conditions.

Itinerary and Accomplishments

The trip was organized by a travel agency called *Terres d'Aventures*, who created a specific and personalized itinerary for IRIS Mundial. In addition, the participants enjoyed the services of a Quebec guide from the agency as well as a French-speaking Peruvian guide, who was friendly, calm, highly cultured and had a great sense of humour!



Days of Acclimation to the High Altitude

The first days of the trip were dedicated to visiting attractions and allowing the participants time to acclimatize to the high altitude and its effects. Thus, they explored the city of Cusco with its maze of narrow streets and colonial houses built on Inca foundations. They attended a traditional music show in addition to visiting the sacred valley and the vertiginous Inca site of *Pisaq* at 3400 meters of altitude. Finally, during this part of the trip, they also walked through the traditional market of *Pisaq* and discovered the *Salinas de Maras*—a magical spectacle with its sheltering of hundreds of salt ponds along the mountain sides.

Beginning of the Trek

After putting the luggage on the llamas, the team members proceeded to walk for nearly seven hours in the *Lares* valley to *Rosa Plata*, a small village overlooking the valley at an altitude of 3300 meters. They finally met the little family who welcomed them and accommodated them for the night, as was to be the case for other every subsequent night of the trek.

During the second day, the team had to turn back after starting the seven-hour trek because of the very bad weather, which was rather exceptional at this time of the year. There was snow, torrential rain, hail and clouds at ground level. So, the following day, the participants set out early as they were determined to climb the *Cuyupa* pass at 4550 meters of altitude originally scheduled the day before. Then, they began day three of the trekking itinerary and walked towards the *Patacancha* Valley. Due to the extra trek, the day ended late and in the dark with headlamps worn for 1h 30 to reach the locals who were waiting for them for the night.

On day four of the trek, they walked for nearly six hours through the famous *Pumamarca* site, an ancient Inca village composed of magnificent terraces, before reaching the final destination: *Ollantaytambo*, another Inca village that remains almost unchanged since its birth in the fifteenth century.

"It made me realize how pampered we are compared to Peruvians who have to walk for hours to meet their basic needs. Nevertheless, they are a proud people and are always happy to welcome the tourists... and their food is excellent", testified Mrs. Denise Poirier.



Visit of Machu Picchu and Ascension of Huayna Picchu

After the trek, the participants took the train to *Aguas Caliente* in order to visit one of the seven wonders of the world—*Machu Picchu*, an Inca architectural jewel implanted in the middle of tropical vegetation. It is a very well-preserved citadel where you can visit different neighborhoods, squares, royal homes, large agricultural areas and observatories. Subsequently, they climbed the *Huayna Picchu*, a vertiginous mountain appearing at the back of the site on the majority of photos. This trek is challenging because certain parts of the path have to be scaled. However, the view at the top of the mountain is really rewarding!

The Experience of the Participants

According to Mrs. Louise Giasson, this adventure was everything that she had wished for and then some because the *Lares* trek is a path isolated from tourists so it provided them a lot of opportunities for intercultural exchanges which really allowed an immersion in the local culture.

She told us: “We each lived an exceptional and transcendent feat! We had no other choice but to put in place a plan A, B, C and even D so that everything could work out.” She was mainly referring to day two of the trek when they had to find a way to travel to the second destination with the guides, going from a cattle truck to a taxi that they ending up pushing because it got stuck in the mud.

Her moment of grace was when she adopted the role of a shepherdess as she walked alone while guiding the luggage-carrying lamas. “I felt like a speck of dust in the vast universe in this huge landscape”, she told us. Her altitude sickness, although causing her a lot of trouble, did not stop her from fully adoring her experience!

Noémie Lespérance-Hudon, for her part, thought that the trip was very rewarding, regardless of the unforeseen circumstances that changed the original plan. According to her, staying motivated to continue walking despite the effects of the high altitude was both a physical and a psychological challenge. “The feeling of achievement when arriving at each destination was worth it! In addition, there was a good group dynamic and chemistry among the team members which was very pleasant!” she told us.

Finally, it is with pride and full of memories that our five adventurers returned to Quebec on June 16. Now, they can proudly proclaim: mission accomplished! IRIS Mundial thanks them a lot for their contribution to the organization; thanks to this charity trip which will help thousands of people to better see the world!

