



# Footsteps of the Incas

Time Traveling through Peru

Ellen, Zoë's mother, is going to visit us in Peru. "I'll just follow like a mother goose follows the little ones," she says as we make initial plans by phone.

"Mom, you know how we travel, right? We sleep in the cheapest places with saggy beds where there is sand, mold, and hair in the bathtub," Zoë replies cautiously. With Ellen's words, "a bed is just a bed, after all," the trip is planned. Zoë's mother flies alone to Cuzco to travel around with us for two weeks.

Ellen hasn't seen us for a year. She hears our fluent Spanish and sees how we move around the country almost like locals. We leave the bikes for two weeks and preplan our route, but everything else we decide on the spur of the moment. Every morning we move to a new place. After a bumpy ride in a crammed minivan, we start looking for a *hospedaje*, or hostel. Normally, we go for the cheapest option available. The first night in Peru—two weeks ago—cost us barely 10 soles, two and a half euros.

With Ellen, we have to be a little more flexible, but we don't want to pay more than 20 soles. We walk from door to door, ask the price, check the rooms, and compare different places.

"I thought I was the frugal Dutchman," Ellen says when we still don't approve of the fourth hotel. The highlight is lunch. We eat for five soles, about 20 cents in euros. Six soles, about 25 cents, we think is too much. We laugh about it to ourselves, but still, we don't stop to think about the real value of one sol. For a normal tourist, six soles is ridiculously cheap, but to us, it is 20 percent more expensive than our norm.

"If we can get something for 25 euros, we wouldn't want to pay 30 euros for the same thing, would we?" we try to explain.

"Dear dears, you really are too stingy," says Ellen. She is unfortunately right, and we later enjoy a restaurant where we pay seven soles. Afterward, we feel a little ashamed of our uncompromising frugality.



Two fishing boats on the Peruvian side of Lake Titicaca (opposite). Slow travel is the secret to discovering real local culture. In an old football stadium, schoolchildren gather to perform traditional dances for their parents (above).