No Pain No Gain

No Pain No Gain   To improve my Spanish I decided to study Spanish in Peru. I had been there before and I keep on returning and I will study Spanish every time until I can talk fluently. While I started to study Spanish, the excitement came when I decided to be part of a trip out of the ordinary.   The objective was to boldly go where no tourist had gone before, this would also help me study Spanish so I was up for it. That was the offer made by Jimmy Aguirre, the official guide of AmeriSpan's language school in Cusco. Together with two friends they organized a weekend trip to a remote archaeological site near Jimmy's parents' hometown of Yaurisque. They had been planning the trip for months, down to the last detail. So, a few gringos, some Dutchies, a German, an Englishman, and a man from Iceland volunteered for the adventure. We where all there to study Spanish but thought this was "the experience".   Our trip started with a bus ride only about 35 kms from Cuzco, but a fairly long ride to 3,900 meters. There, in the middle of nowhere, we mounted our bikes and headed down. After an hour or so, I couldn't have cared less about the view and just wanted off. Luckily, right about then we rolled into our lunch stop, Jimmy's grandparents' house. We were then ushered into the altar room where we were fed sandwiches and fruit while Grandma lit candles and prayed for our journey, which seems to have worked!   After lunch, it was time to hit the dusty trail again, but this time on four legs instead of two wheels. We were a bit surprised that our trusty steeds did not actually have saddles but rather blankets and rope. It turned out to be sufficient gear for our leisurely stroll along the Eucalyptus wooded riverbank. Of course, no gain without pain, soon my inner thighs were screaming with saddle soreness. There it was again, that simultaneous feeling of physical torture and visual ecstasy. These where the times where I wish I would have preferred to have stayed in Cuzco to study Spanish which was my main objective.   We finally came to the end of that leg of the journey, this time, no procession or sandwiches awaited. This time, it was a mountain to climb! After about an hour, we breathlessly arrived at the archaeological site Maucallacta, recently discovered and uncovered and previously visited only by archaeologists and locals. We were the first group of tourists to tread that sacred ground and even though our objective in Peru was to study Spanish, we were rocking!   That night, the local shaman came to perform a Pago a la Tierra (Payment to the Earth).   He performed a blessing ceremony where we all got involved and with burning wood, purple and blue flames, colored powder and other rituals we experienced a magical moment. This is when I could say "why study Spanish this weekend, I had to do this!"   As you might imagine, we slept like the dead until we were awakened by the faint sound of live music. We woke up and were brought hot water to wash up with! We were treated to a fabulous breakfast of local-made cheese, fresh papaya juice, and REAL coffee. We then discovered the source of the music. A group from the neighboring village of Mollebamba (pop. 500) came to present us with a gift. Dressed in well-worn handmade traditional dress and playing homemade instruments, they performed traditional dances in the courtyard of the ruins. This was not a tourist attraction, but a real gift to us. Imagine when they dragged us to the dance floor, what a sight we were, especially the 6'7 American dancing with the 4 ft. Quechua woman! Not being able to understand her kept on reminding me "I have to study Spanish".   We were invited to their village to learn about how they live. So off we went, up and down the slippery slope to Mollebamba. We gringos were slipping and sliding all the way while grandmas and kids in flip-flops seemingly glided along. Upon arrival, we were invited into the town mayor's home. A cozy adobe affair complete with guinea pigs and chickens running around. And don't think the mayor is above the people; pretty much all the homes were about the same. Once they overcame their shyness, they were very eager to have foreign ears hear about their lives which also helped me study Spanish and improve my comprehension skills. Luckily we had Jimmy to translate their stories for us from Quechua to Spanglish since I was able to understand half of what they were saying.   Once again, after this trip I had accomplished my mission to study Spanish and experienced one of the most unique trips ever. I would continue to study Spanish back home and considering coming back later on. To study Spanish during the last few years has helped me accomplish many goals. I advise you to study Spanish abroad, wherever you prefer, but do it. Study Spanish Abroad!

About the Author

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