

LIM

TAKING A PERUVIAN DETOUR

A pair of world travelers follow an unexpected path to Machu Picchu. **BY ARCHANA RAM**

IT MAY HAVE BEEN the unpasteurized cheese at the market—or maybe it was the raw egg in our pisco sours. Either way, getting salmonella poisoning in Peru was not the way my boyfriend and I intended to kick off our 13-month journey around the world.

Because Peru was the first country on our itinerary, we approached it with extra gusto—street food! solo hikes! haggling at the market!—but it all came to a halt just one week in when we contracted salmonella poisoning, spent two nights in a clinic and were forced to skip the classic Inca Trail trek to

Morning mist flowing over Machu Picchu. BELOW RIGHT: Walking one of the trails at the Incan site.



Puzzle credits

Machu Picchu that we had booked months before.

There was no chance we'd leave without seeing the famous landmark, so we turned to our hostelmates for suggestions. As they explained, there are many more (and cheaper) ways to get to Machu Picchu: ones that pass through hot springs, others that traverse high-altitude trails and even a one-day train ride. So we went for the most adventurous-sounding option—a jungle trek to the peak.

With eight other backpackers, we sped down hills on mountain bikes, hiked the Inca Trail, zip-lined seven consecutive lines and white-water rafted the Urubamba River, all in pursuit of the Incan mountain. And despite feeling disheveled and bleary-eyed when we took the 4 a.m. bus to the gates of Machu Picchu on day four, I wouldn't have had it any other way. We watched a thick fog blanket the mountain and slowly fade away to reveal the iconic silhouette at dawn. It was every bit as serene and powerful as people say it is, and navigating through Peru's various landscapes to get there offered a unique way to connect to the sacred land.

I wouldn't say the journey was more important than the destination, but our last-minute decision set the tone for our trip. In Peru it offered variety and adventure, along with a valuable lesson to carry throughout the year. We learned to appreciate spontaneity and realized that there's never just one way to reach your goal. ▼



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