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## Exploring Peru's Inca History

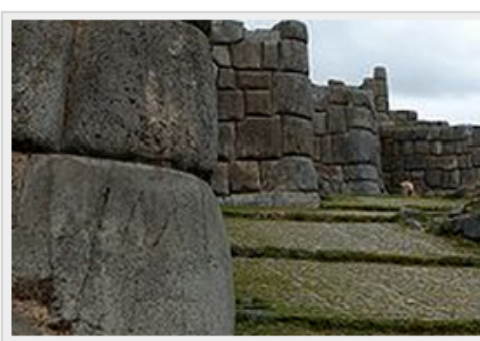
Pimsleur Approach - December 28, 2012 - Spanish - Comments (0)

Archeological sites in Peru confirm the existence of the Inca Empire, but proof of the ancient society does not end there. As you travel through what once stood as the Inca Empire, you get a firsthand look at agricultural methods, building practices, art styles and clothing designs created by the Incas centuries ago.

Before Spanish conquistadors reached the Andes, the Incas created the largest society in South America. While Peru is known for its Incan heritage, the empire spanned much of the Pacific coast, as far north as Ecuador and throughout Chile in the south.

Cusco, located in the southeast of Peru, stood as the capital of the Inca Empire. The Incas erected temples and ceremonial sites throughout the region, as well as the fortresses of Machu Picchu and Sacsayhuaman. Inca architects erected structures that would withstand earthquakes and scientists created testing sites that remain a mystery today.

While the Spanish destroyed many of the Incas' temples, fortresses and towns, some survived at least partially intact. When visiting Peru, you can explore the history of the empire by visiting its museums and archeological sites, as well as venturing into small towns and villages that keep the ancient traditions alive.



Ruins of Sacsayhuamán - via Wikipedia

### Origins

After the demise of the Wari Empire, its few survivors migrated north from the Lake Titicaca area. The new settlers arrived in the Cusco region in approximately 1100 and formed the basic society on which the Inca Empire arose.

The noble class formed during the thirteenth century, during which time the first Inca emperor, Manco Capac, rose to power. Between 1250 and 1532, the year the Spanish arrived in South America, the Incas expanded their empire along the western edge of the continent. At its height of

power, the Inca Empire ruled over approximately nine million people.

If you travel to the city of Cusco, you can visit Museo Inka, also referred to as the Archeological Museum of Cusco, to learn more about the early origins of the empire. The museum features a collection of pre-Columbian Incan mummies, along with textiles, jewelry, vases, architectural models and ceramics excavated from sites throughout Peru.

### Society

The Incas referred to their emperor as the "Sapa Inca." Priests and relatives of former emperors made up the noble class. Certain members of society, such as architects, held high social positions because they performed essential tasks for the empire. Peasants and slaves ranked at the bottom of the social structure. However, most Inca citizens fell into the working class, which included farmers and laborers.

The Incas spoke Quechua, which remains one of Peru's official languages. When visiting Andean regions, you will notice signs written in Spanish and Quechua and may encounter rural residents who only speak the latter.

Inca women worked only in the home, caring for their children, cooking and cleaning. Families typically offered their daughters for marriage at the age of 16. Men from aristocratic families could marry many wives, but men from lower social classes were restricted to one wife. Marriages often occurred on a trial basis. After the initial few years of marriage, a couple had the option to separate and dissolve the marriage. However, if a couple remained together, the marriage became final, after which time the law only allowed divorce if the woman could not bear children.

The Incas did not use money, but rather bartered for goods with labor. The Incan government imposed taxes throughout the empire, which residents paid by working in fields or assisting with construction projects.

Gold and silver were fashioned into jewelry for nobles and royals, or used to create religious statues or adornments for temples. The Incas typically buried royals and aristocrats with their jewelry. While visiting Peru's archeological sites, you often see evidence of grave robbers, who destroyed ruins in search of treasure.



One of the main events in the conquest of the Incan Empire was the death of Atahualpa, the last Sapa Inca on 29 August 1533 - via Wikipedia

### Religion

The Incas worshiped many gods and goddesses associated with the sun, moon and stars, as well as natural occurrences, such as thunder and rainbows. They performed daily rituals to appease all gods, who they believed could intervene to protect the empire from natural dangers or enemy aggression.

The Incas called the goddess of thunder and lightning "Illapa" and the sun god, patron deity to the city of Cusco, "Inti." Each year during the month of June, the city holds its Inti Raymi

celebration, the largest Inca cultural festival of the year. Hundreds of thousands of Peruvians flock to Cusco for a week of traditional Inca ceremonies, parades and parties.

Inca beliefs placed significant spiritual importance on certain animals, especially the snake, jaguar and condor, which you can often see illustrated in Incan artwork. While visiting the Department of Cusco, you often find souvenir replicas of tumis, Inca ceremonial knives. The Incas often made tumis from gold and adorned them with gemstones and intricate etchings, often depicting the condor. Inca priests used tumis to sacrifice llamas, in an attempt to appease the gods.

Priests also performed human sacrifices to celebrate festivals or the death of a royal. Mummification of human remains was common, even among those in lower social classes. The Incas believed their dead ancestors could speak to them through omens and dreams, but only Inca priests could interpret signs delivered from the dead.

The Museo Inka in the city of Cusco exhibits a large collection of Incan religious artifacts and mummies. You can also find Incan pottery and tumis on display in Cusco antique shops.

### Architecture

Incan architecture has become famous throughout the world, largely due to the discovery of Machu Picchu during the early twentieth century. Common Incas constructed their homes using mud bricks. Most common homes did not have doors or windows and roofs were thatched. Families used cloth or leather to cover doorways and a stone stove provided heating.



Machu Picchu - via Wikipedia

The Incas considered architecture a high art form and spared no effort in creating royal palaces, fortresses and temples. Such buildings were constructed using hand-carved stones, which interlocked and did not require mortar. Architects designed structures to withstand earthquakes and installed plumbing systems that ran throughout towns and into houses.

Inca governments also commissioned roadways, which ran throughout mountain and coastal regions. One such roadway, known as the Inca Trail, has become a favorite route for foreign trekkers traveling from Cusco to Machu Picchu.

The Spanish destroyed many Inca structures, especially temples, plundering the sites for treasure. However, archeologists from around the world have painstakingly excavated many remaining Inca sites. From Cusco, you can visit the fortress of Machu Picchu, the agricultural site of Moray, the royal retreat at Ollantaytambo and the hilltop fortress of Sacsayhuaman.

### Fall of the Inca Empire

Spanish conquistadors, led by Francisco Pizarro, arrived in South America in the sixteenth century. By the 1530s, the Spanish had invaded the capital city of Cusco. The city fell to the Spanish in 1534, but Manco Capac, an Inca warrior from the jungle town of Vilcabamba, assembled his armies and continued to fight. Manco's military campaigns proved fruitless and he retreated to Vilcabamba, where he and his descendants ruled for several decades.

The Spanish defeated the last Inca army in 1572. They captured Tupac Amaru, the last Inca ruler, and put him on trial for the murder of several Catholic priests. Historical records of the event vary, but many historians believe the priests died unintentionally, a consequence of the bloody and protracted war. A Spanish-controlled court convicted Amaru of the crimes and, over the objections of King Philip II, executed the last Inca emperor in Cusco's Plaza de Armas.

The Spanish never found Machu Picchu and its inhabitants remain there after the fall of Cusco. However, diseases brought to Peru by the Europeans ravaged the country and ended the Inca Empire. Smallpox was the first disease to spread, killing the majority of the Inca population, followed by typhus, influenza and measles, which dealt the final fatal blow.

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