



PILGRIMAGE TO PERU

April Orcutt meets her heroes

Four Quechuans – descendants of the Incas – wearing brightly coloured, intricately woven and finely embroidered traditional skirts and jackets work diligently on backstrap looms, looped around a wooden pole in the middle of the showroom at the Centre for Traditional Textiles of Cusco (El Centro de Textiles Tradicionales del Cusco or CTTC), high in Peru's Andes Mountains. An older woman on a stool weaves her symbolic story into a scarf in shades of teal and brick, while a teenage girl with an exquisitely woven burgundy, ivory and black manta (shawl) over her shoulders knits a complex pattern into a woollen hat. A young man in a knit cap and bright vest studies the geometric tapestry he's creating. A woman wearing a ruffled vermillion hat from the village of Sallac-Urcos works on the floor among a pile of red, yellow, purple, green and black abstractly patterned shawls.

Should these Quechuan artisans momentarily lack for inspiration, they could look up at the myriad patterns and symbols in the rows of splendid table runners, purses, tote bags, blankets, cushions that line the walls in the CTTC. Or they could wander through the CTTC's small museum, which celebrates Inca weaving traditions, tells the importance of symbols incorporated into textiles, explores the Quechuan people's connection to their centuries-old culture and displays exquisite hats, mantas, festival dress and wedding clothing.

Weaving and other textile arts have been part of Inca culture for millennia. I came to Cusco and the Sacred Valley (El Valle Sagrado) in the high

CTTC -- www.textilescusco.org/eng
Culture Xplorers -- www.cultureexplorers.com

Selvedge

elevations of the Andes to learn about these artworks – which I adore – and to meet their creators. Four times a year the CTTC holds natural dyeing workshops for local weavers where corn, flowers, twigs, leaves, roots, bark and cochineal insects are boiled into intense colours – and are modified naturally to create additional or softer shades. This is the local artists' best opportunity to dye cotton and alpaca, llama and sheep wool that they will use during the next few months. Watching and learning about dyeing the fibres can be incorporated into day trips or longer tours.

At the outdoor Sunday Market in Chinchero, Quechuan women display vibrant purses, runners, belts, etc., ranging from elaborate and detailed to simple (and inexpensive). Some of these Inca descendants spoke only Quechua – not even Spanish – but I enjoyed meeting them, bargaining with sign language for weavings and buying three distinctive purses.

Built on the site of a 15th-century Inca ceremonial court that was reconstructed into a Spaniard's mansion, Cusco's Pre-Columbian Art Museum (Museo de Arte Precolombino or MAP) displays remarkable works from six ancient Peruvian cultures created between 1250 B.C. and 1532 A.D. Most works are made of gold, silver, ceramics and wood, and all come from the distinguished Larco Museum in Lima. The CTTC has a small shop here.

My textile tour started in Lima at the stunning ▶





Larco Museum (Museo Larco), which has a full gallery devoted to textiles. Ancient Peruvians wove nets nearly 5,000 years ago and expanded from that to cloth, mantles and other utilitarian items, and then to decorative pieces like tapestries. The arid climate in highland areas preserved many textiles, including quipus. While this textile bookkeeping system looks like a necklace, it was in fact an important element of Inca society. The Larco's collection also includes still-colourful weavings depicting animals and what look like mazes and geometric patterns, but which no doubt held great significance for the people then. I could stare at those motifs for hours.

Also in Lima, the Amano Pre-Columbian Textile Museum (Amano Museo Textil Precolombino), which reopened last spring after extensive renovations, "displays the entire process required for the production of the textiles exhibited in the museum, from the selection of raw materials, to dyeing, spinning, and the types of loom employed," according to its website. With nearly six hundred works on display from Chancay, Inca, Chimú, Moche, Nasca, Chuquibamba, Sihuas, Chavín, Paracas, Lambayeque and Huari cultures, the Amano is now a focus of textile tourism.

Nonetheless, I personally treasured travelling high in the Andes in the Cusco, Chinchero and Sacred Valley areas – especially seeing Quechuans in their gorgeous woven and embroidered traditional dress, each village's garments different from the others. ♦♦♦ April Orcutt www.cultureexplorers.com, www.textilescusco.org/eng

• **Culture Xplorers** Culture Xplorers' connections get textile fans behind the scenes and deeper into the weavers' culture in Peru, Guatemala and Chiapas, Mexico. 6001 Oak St., Kansas City, MO 64113, U.S.A. T: +1/215-870-3585 www.culturexplorers.com

• **The 2016 Weavers Awards** will be held in Chinchero, Peru, on 10 Aug.

• **Centre for Traditional Textiles of Cusco** (El Centro de Textiles Tradicionales de Cusco) The CTTC's store, gallery and museum are near Qorikancha, the Inca Temple of the Sun. Often local weavers work in the exhibition area. Avenida Sol 603, Cusco, Peru T: +51-84-228-117 or T: +51-84-236-880 www.textilescusco.org/eng.

• **Pre-Columbian Art Museum** (Museo de Arte Precolombino or MAP) MAP displays works of Peruvian art from 1250 B.C. through 1535 A.D., and the CTTC has a small shop there. 231 Plaza de las Nazarenas Cusco, Peru map.museolarco.org/home_en.html

• **El Centro de Textiles** in Chinchero. This smaller CTTC annex in Chinchero holds weaving demonstrations and sells high-quality textiles. www.textilescusco.org/eng

• **Sunday Market in Chinchero** Handmade textile goods in a variety of quality and prices are sold by Quechuan artists at this lively weekly morning market in Chinchero.

• **Larco Museum** (Museo Larco) The Larco features stunning 'treasures from ancient Peru.' Av. Bolivar 1515, Pueblo Libre, Lima T: +51-1-461-1312 or T: +51-1-461 1835 or T: +51-1-461-5640 www.museolarco.org/en/

• **Amano – Pre-Columbian Textile Museum** After extensive renovations the Amano and its magnificent collection of pre-Columbian textiles re-opened in spring, 2015. Retiro 160, Miraflores, Lima, T: +51-1-441-2909 eng.museoamano.org

