

Maximum Lima!



It is often said that quantity is not quality, but if you can mesh the two terms together, the result can be memorable. Our first day in Lima was one of those “fill in every minute with experiences”-type days, and allowed us to totally immerse ourselves in the destination, which is exactly what we wanted to do.

Technically, aside from landing at Jorge Chavez International Airport at 6:30 am, we spent the day in the Lima suburbs of San Isidro, Miraflores and Barranco. After an all night flight from New York with little sleep, we landed on schedule, passed through passport control quickly, and despite our priority tagged luggage being the very last to be taken off the plane, we still left the terminal before 7:30 am. My colleague and I were attending the ASTA International Destination Expo and had arrived a few days early to get acclimatized. For me it was a welcome return to a city I had explored in 2003,

but for my colleague it was a new adventure in South America. ASTA had arranged for a driver to pick us up and take us to the Westin Hotel, so even with the Sunday morning traffic, we were at the hotel and checked in by 8:30 am

I will say that not all Westin hotels are created alike and that this is one of the best hotels I have every stayed at. The customer service is amazing, the concierge service is outstanding, the rooms –and even the decorations in the hallways—are warm, comfortable and inviting.

Really the only negative of the day was when I went to open my suitcase—the lock was still on—but the slider—on the zipper had been chopped off. Inside my suitcase was a note from U.S. Homeland Security explaining that they had randomly selected my suitcase for inspection and had every right to chop off the lock. Well, in

effect my suitcase was totally ruined, but I would resolve that another day. Time was fleeting!

We made friend with the hotel concierge who gave us a few orientation tips, and then put us in a car to take us to Miraflores. While only 15 minutes away, the hotel car costs \$11.00 US. A street taxi costs 6 Peruvian soles (about \$2.50 US). Everyone says to be very careful when hailing a street taxi as there are some 'bad apples' out there, but from this point on, we always hailed our own taxi and never encountered any problems.

Spotting a café by Kennedy Park in Miraflores, we had breakfast with delicious coffee (in fact the coffee is great just about everywhere in Peru) and then walked the 30 minutes toward Larcomar, the seaside shopping complex that graces the cliffs of Miraflores. Below we could see surfers, kids playing football, and even some brave souls playing in the cold Pacific waters. Larcomar has many stores that you would see at a typical mall in Canada, with a few unique craft stores and restaurants, a video arcade and some fast food. After a quick look around, we wandered back downtown.

Sunday in Miraflores is quite relaxed (and very safe). There are art exhibits on the street and in the park. People are exercising in groups or doing tai-chi; walking their dogs, enjoying the flowers, attending the nearby church or chatting in the outdoor cafes. We headed over to the craft markets to browse the Inca-inspired textiles, chatchkas, masks, alpaca sweaters, ceramics, T-shirts, musical instruments and paintings. And then it was time to grab a taxi back to our hotel in San Isidro.

Once there we decided to break two of our own travel rules. 1) Try not to eat at the hotel (local food at a local restaurant is preferred) and 2) Only order room service in a hunger emergency. As we had only one hour before we would leave again, we ordered ceviche (raw fish marinated in citrus juices) and a club sandwich. The ceviche was fresh and delicious, the club sandwich was one of the best I have eaten anywhere (and I've had a lot of clubs!).

While still in Canada, we had contacted Ronald Elward of Lima Walks regarding an afternoon tour of Barranco, and the message left in our room was that he would meet us in the lobby at 3:00 pm, So off we went again. We got a taxi to Barranco, which is a wonderful suburb just south of Miraflores known for its upscale, safe environment, colonial architecture, bars and nightlife in general. For two hours we wandered the streets, taking in the style and stories about the various houses and buildings. We learned that all the houses were built after the city recuperated from the great Lima earthquake of 1746. We wandered across the Bridge of Sighs (Puente de los Suspiros) where according to legend, anyone crossing the bridge for the first time while holding his/her breath will have their wish fulfilled, and then we ended the afternoon with cold beers at a café overlooking the ocean.

Ronald had recommended the restaurant at Huaca Pucllana in Miraflores for dinner. A Huaca is a 'sacred place' and this particular pyramid dates back about 1000 years. The restaurant next door allows you to experience fine dining while enjoying beautiful views of the historic site. We were seated at an outdoor table. With excellent service, amazing food. (I had the grilled tuna, my colleague had the duck), and a relaxed,



The grilled tuna at Huaca Pucllana

almost mystical atmosphere. This is now entered into my list of top restaurants around the world.

Finally at 9:00 pm we headed back to the Westin. Quite an active day but if anything it emphasizes all the things you can do to fully immerse yourself into a city, taking in the culture, the food and the spirit of adventure on the very first day of any trip. It was our intention to maximize our time in Lima and we were now off and running!