

Peru

Paws for thought in Machu Picchu

Robyn Jankel, granddaughter of Michael Bond, the creator of Paddington, discovers the real Peru on a mountain trek

Growing up with Paddington Bear as part of your family, assumptions are rife. We must love marmalade, we all wear duffel coats, we frequently stow away on transatlantic ships. One of the most popular well-meant but repetitive questions is "Have you ever been to Peru?"

Until relatively recently, I hadn't. More surprisingly, my grandfather Michael Bond, the creator of Paddington Bear – subject of a new film coming out this month – still hasn't visited the country.

My mother, Karen Jankel, runs the business, Paddington & Co, and as a result we slept in bedrooms hung with Paddington-printed curtains, carried pencil cases emblazoned with his image, and wore pyjamas covered with his pawprint. My teenage embarrassment knew no bounds as friends visiting our house were greeted by Paddington rugs, mugs, bubble bath, wellington boots, tablecloth, clock, pencils... not to mention the countless stuffed toys and the books themselves scattered liberally throughout.

My early adult life was spent trying to avoid the unavoidable

family connection – and that included Peru. And then my mum threw a spanner in the works. At the age of 52 and having withstood a complicated hip replacement, she decided she wanted to walk to Machu Picchu. She planned to raise money for Action Medical Research, a charity that funds research into illnesses affecting babies and children, of which she was a trustee and Paddington is the mascot. And I, in a spontaneous and uncharacteristic moment of reverse mother-child responsibility, offered to accompany her.

Eschewing the oversubscribed Inca Trail route (which at the time was closed to charity groups), we opted for the Lares Trek. This is part of the same network, but very much the road less travelled.

It's higher than the Inca Trail, more remote, and considerably tougher, often a barely discernible track, clinging to the mountainside.

While the Inca Trail is positively crowded, we encountered just two other groups during our three days in the wilderness.

Far from the pre-built

campsites, our tents were pitched on whatever rare flat ground could be found. The one downside was that, although the Inca Trail ends at Machu Picchu itself, the Lares tails off in an unprepossessing village. But as a trade-off, the latter offers a genuine insight into Andean life.

I had anticipated Peru to be a land of jovial people, probably speaking English, wearing colourful clothes and not overly concerned about the occasional appearance of a bear in polite society. Perhaps surprisingly, these mountain folk were remarkably similar to the visions in my head: friendly and placid, dressed like Aunt Lucy. It was all strangely familiar.

We encountered local children on their way to school, walking several hours in both directions. They glanced shyly at our water-filled Platypuses and sturdy Goretex boots. We stared back at



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their eye-wateringly bright clothes, a welcome contrast to the muted tones of the Andean mountainside. Far above the tree line, vegetation was limited to scrub and moss. The scale and gradient of the mountains were breathtaking; a vision filled with heathery blues and rocky greys, punctuated by the

Clockwise from above left, Robyn with Paddington; hiking the Lares Trek from Cusco to Aguas Calientes; Machu Picchu; the town of Cusco; Peruvian women in the traditional, colourful clothes favoured by Aunt Lucy

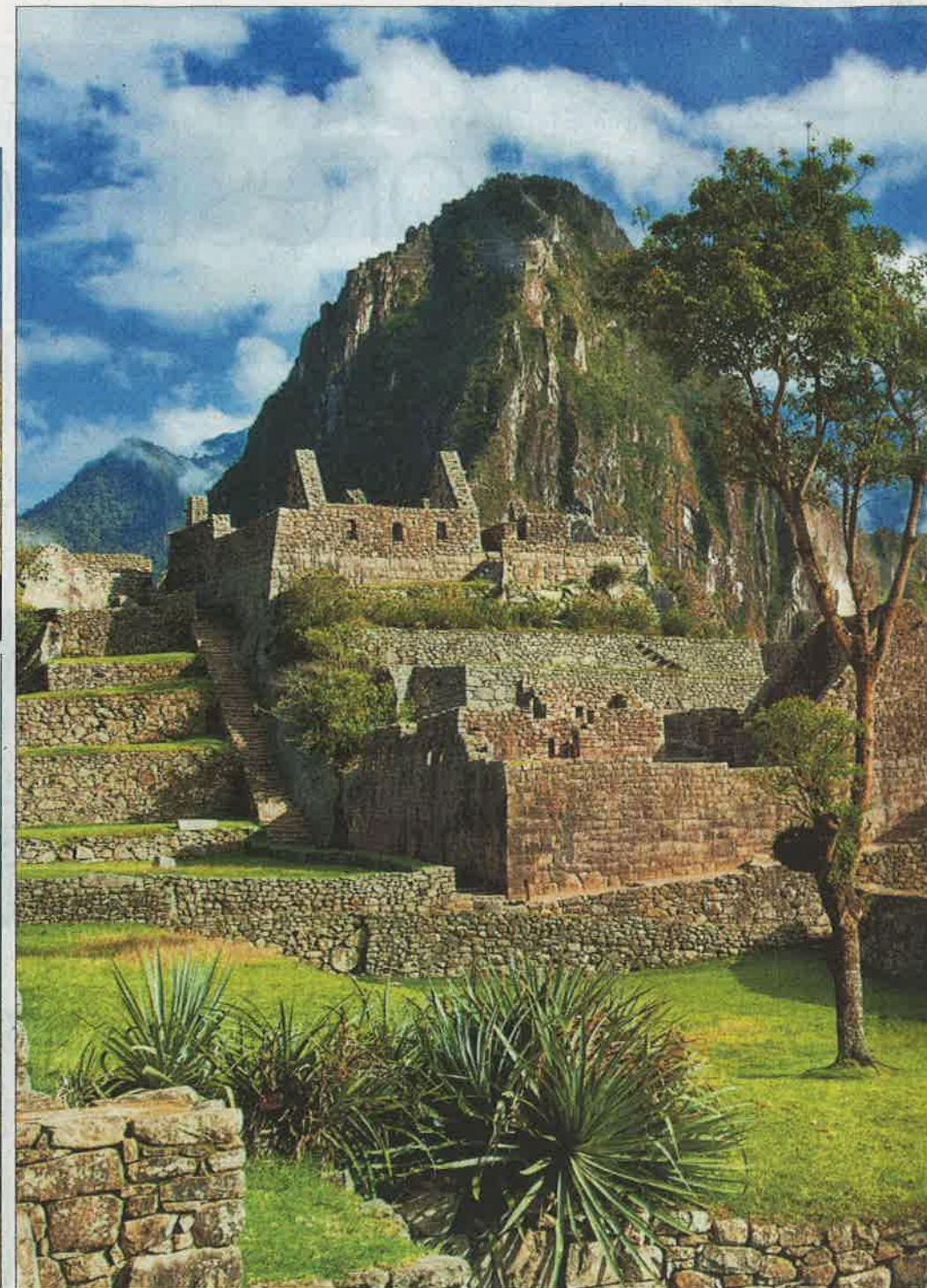
occasional orange slash of a dusty naked rock face, rudely exposed by recent landslides.

We scaled a 4,550m (15,000ft) pass in the sunshine, both the exertion and emotion leaving everyone in tears. The second, slightly lower pass was buffeted by stinging rain and winds so strong that we weren't allowed to rest at the top but hurriedly had to slip down jagged scree on the other side. One of our party fell ill but the air was too thin for a rescue helicopter. She was carried down the mountain, piggybacking on a porter who literally ran along the indistinct trail while I struggled to put one foot in front of the other, clutching a Paddington key ring that I'd brought out of a sense of loyalty and secretly squeezed for moral support.

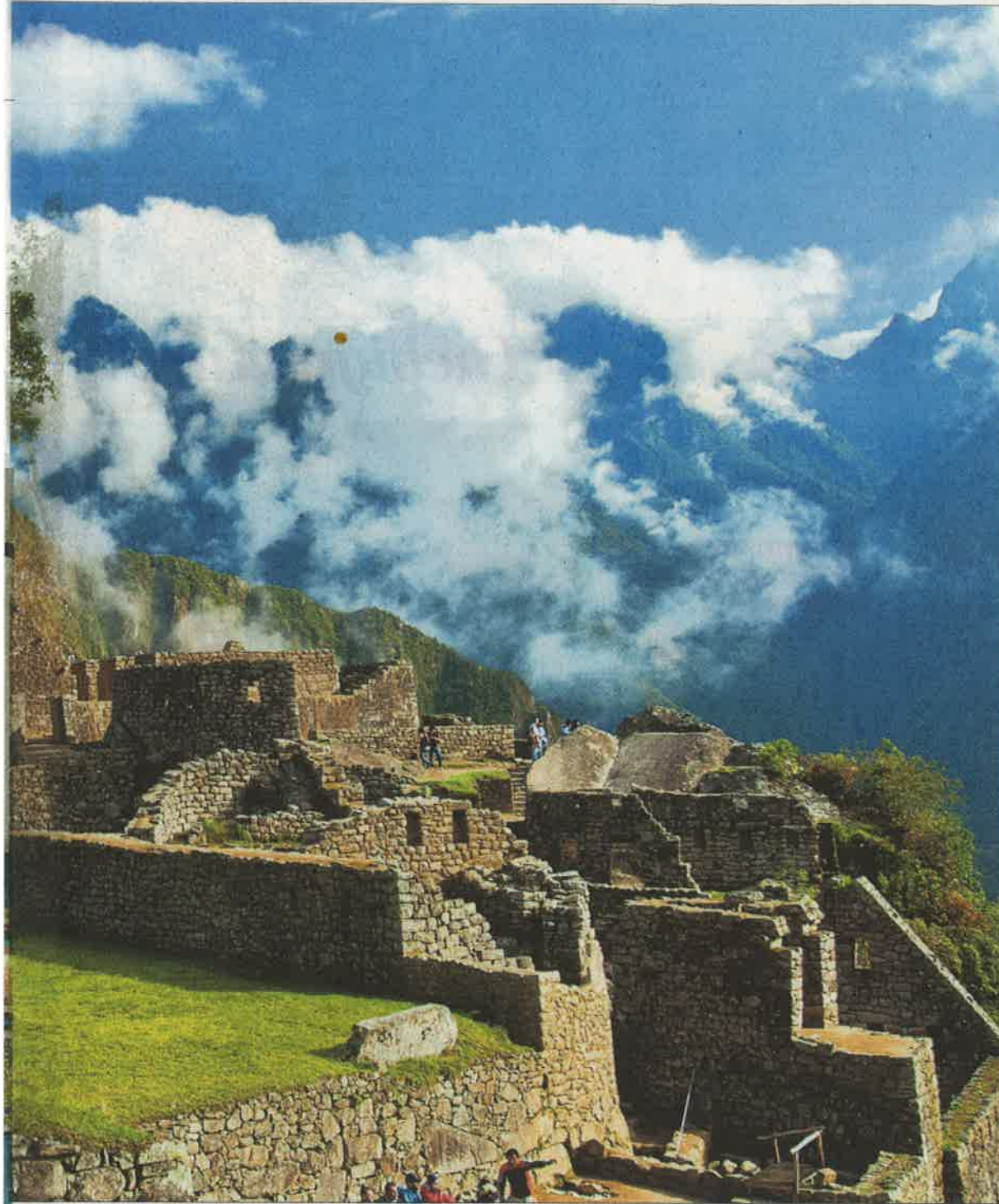
Our astonishing porters carried bags and tents, shepherded the mules and raced ahead to set up camp. Meals were three-course,

gourmet and candlelit. My mother, suffering from altitude sickness, could barely manage a mouthful, so I helpfully wolfed down her share. There are nearly 4,000 varieties of potato in Peru, and I think I ate them all. Marmalade never featured, but we bulked out on quinoa and local vegetables. And just as we were feeling full and smug about our eight-hour walk and healthy (if gigantic) meal, a child would appear from nowhere clutching bottles of the ubiquitous Cerveza Cusquena.

We were the only group of non-Peruvians for miles, but somehow people in these outlying hamlets knew we were coming. None the less, I struggled with the altitude enough to turn down every offer of beer, only cutting loose on our final night in the mountains. This post-walk celebration took place in Aguas Calientes, a pretty town in Machu Picchu's shadow, with an



Telegraph offers



atmosphere like Cartagena in *Romancing the Stone*, and blindingly good deals on pisco sours.

Machu Picchu was a marvel. Unlike those on the Inca Trail, we hadn't arrived at the glorious Sun Gate and instead were unceremoniously bussed in to the main entrance with all the other tourists. After three days in splendid isolation, the crowds were jarring. We jostled for space on cliff edges for the perfect postcard shot. To my bemusement, many other visitors bore Paddington memorabilia, posing with their British bears in front of the ancient Incan city. It was simultaneously normal (we were doing the same thing, after all) and bizarre.

We had one final treat before returning home to lives free of blisters, altitude sickness and mountain vistas: an afternoon in Lima. I say "treat". Lima had formed more of a vision in my

head than any other element of the books, probably because Paddington himself seemed so eternally English; I was perfectly familiar with Portobello Road, accidental scrapes and the difficulties of fitting into polite English society as an eager, outspoken youngster. Paddington's Aunt Lucy, meanwhile, at her Home For Retired Bears in Lima, represented something more compelling and unfamiliar.

My young mind had filled in the gaps, creating a Peruvian fantasy that my older self had never seen fit to question. Aunt Lucy's occasional letters to Paddington, and his brief mentions of her to the Brown family, were far more embedded in my subconscious than I had realised. Consequently I envisioned Lima as a mystical, sleepy town nestled in a valley, surrounded by jungle. To this day, I can conjure up an image of the retirement home: perched on a hillside, overlooking

the gentle hubbub, a blanketed Aunt Lucy in a rocking chair, bathed in the glow of the setting sun as she pens fond missives to her distant nephew.

In reality Lima is a heaving coastal metropolis. No mountains, no jungle, just urbanisation on three sides and sea on the fourth, flecked in turn with parasailing tourists. Crime rates are comparatively high, as in most South American cities, meaning European visitors rarely stray beyond the confines of Miraflores, a seafront enclave populated by expensive, sanitised restaurants and glassy skyscrapers.

Our tour group was whisked directly there, and strongly advised not to leave. My experience of Lima's outlying areas was limited to glimpses through the coach windows, a typical hodgepodge of cramped low-rise shops, apartments, ragged electrical lines,

'I envisioned Lima as a mystical, sleepy town. In reality it is a heaving coastal metropolis'

unmoving traffic and little green space. The shops of Miraflores sold polished versions of the jewellery and knitted items we had encountered in the mountains, only on the coast they came at 10 times the price and with better customer service.

Cusco, where we had begun our trip, was really the Lima of my expectations: a smaller mountainside city with wide streets, few cars, a large square surrounded by colonial buildings (now housing tea-shops and bars) and people in traditional dress. I was enthralled by Cusco, even at its lung-stretching altitude of 3,400m (11,000ft). Lima may have more to offer, but what I saw was hard to love.

Back home, people inevitably asked if I'd encountered Paddington's relatives. No such luck, I admitted. I'd scaled mountains, walked for 50 hours, eaten guinea pig, slept at 3,600m (12,00ft), raised

nearly £4,000 for charity and gazed upon a wonder of the ancient world. None the less, Paddington remained their primary interest.

Spectacled bears don't live in mountains, of course. They're native to the Peruvian forests, considerably further south of our adventures. If I were to explore Paddington's true homeland, it would require another trip.

And will I go back? Well, Peru was not the country I'd imagined. It's far more nuanced, complicated and fascinating, and I've only explored a tiny fragment. I suppose some people visit the country hoping for a glimpse of the bear that symbolises their childhood, and it wouldn't be any stranger for me to do much the same thing.

Many people ask my mum: "You grew up with Paddington. Do you think of him as real?" Her standard response is: "I wouldn't be surprised if he walked in the

Spectacled bear necessities



They may not wear blue duffel coats and endearingly large red hats, but there is a certain cuteness to the spectacled Andean bear to be found in deepest, darkest Peru.

The cuteness lies in those distinctive semicircular creamy white markings around the eyes; there is a cuteness, too, in their modest size (averaging 440lb, they are on the small side for bears), a soulful gaze and a fine colouring of fur that incorporates black, brown and tinges of red.

Not that young Yogui was in "stroke me I'm so cute" mode as he paced up and down in his pen in the extensive grounds of the Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel in Peru.

"It's the mating season," said José, one of the Inkaterra rangers. "And he senses the presence of a female close by."

Yogui was the first of five spectacled Andean bears to be transferred to the Inkaterra hotel as part of a project dedicated to the preservation and better treatment of a dwindling and exploited

species. Its numbers have dropped to between 3,000 and 6,000 and it has often been mistreated at the hands of circus owners and others seeking an exotic form of pet.

Yogui was rescued from cruel captivity in 2001 and has since enjoyed more space, regular meals (fruits and marmalade sandwiches) and the watchful attention of skilled monitors.

While it is unlikely that Yogui will ever be capable of being released into the wild (male spectacled Andean bears can be extremely territorial), one of the bears that has been cared for at the Inkaterra site did make a successful dash for freedom, and there are hopes that others may follow.

And besides, while Yogui is still in captivity, the conditions he enjoys in his spectacular cloud forest sanctuary in deepest, darkest Peru are considerably better than those he endured before.

Adrian Bridge

door and sat down for dinner."

Perhaps I wouldn't be any more surprised if I saw him drop from a tree in the Peruvian jungle and offer me a marmalade sandwich. Perhaps I will return to find out.

Wild Frontiers (020 7736 3968; wildfrontierstravel.com) has an extensive Latin American programme, including an eight-day tour of Peru taking in Lima, Cusco, the Lares Trek and Machu Picchu from £1,295 per person. The price includes accommodation with breakfast, guided sightseeing, internal flights and transfers. It excludes international flights, which cost from £484 return. Michael Bond's new book, *Love from Paddington* (HarperCollins, £12.99), can be ordered from Telegraph Books (0844 871 1515; books.telegraph.co.uk) for £10.99, plus £1.95 p&p. *Paddington* goes out on general release at UK cinemas on November 28.