

# Peru inspires and amazes UAS group

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Peru, a land of beauty and mystique, was met by an excited 16-member UAS group this winter break. I remember looking around at the faces as we gathered in the airport in Seattle and seeing the familiar glow of travelers embarking on a new mission. Most of us were not strangers to foreign travel, though for many of us this would be our first chance to use our Spanish skills where it really counts. It was also a new and interesting endeavor in group travel.

We flew into Peru with no real itinerary in mind; all of our major moves were decided by impromptu group discussions. Starting by flying into Lima, Peru's overpopulated, impoverished capitol, we were planning on somehow getting to Cuzco, Peru's Mecca of ancient Incan and artistic culture. We stayed a few days in Lima, then a decision was made to split the group and meet in Puno, a small town in the Andes located on the shore of Lake Titicaca. Five students went by bus, stopping to look at the famous Nazca lines, giant expanses of ancient sand graffiti. The rest of us stayed a few days in Pisco, a beach town south of Lima. Some of those students took a day trip



Photo courtesy of Evelyn Cushing  
Peruvian music was one of the many highlights of the UAS group's visit this past winter break.

to Nazca, and then we all flew to the Andes.

We decided to spend Christmas in Puno and then head to Cuzco by bus. We spent the remainder of our time in Cuzco aside from a five-day excursion hiking the Incan

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Trail to Machu Picchu, the ruins of the Incan capitol city.

As many of you know, Spanish instructor Rick Bellagh has hosted a number of excursions of this nature, including Mexico, Cuba and Venezuela. This trip was slightly varied in one aspect: anthropology teacher Dan Montieth came along as a co-teacher. With Peru (especially Cusco) being the archeological center for ancient Incan culture, Dan's expertise was highly conducive to furthering our understanding and appreciation of Incan and Pre-Incan culture. Our Spanish skills also instantly improved as soon as we set foot in the country. Breaking a language barrier is, of course, extremely difficult. After one semester of Spanish, I thought I'd have a little more to work from. However, I still remember the first Spanish I heard in Peru as the man reviewing my passport began to ask me questions. I could just feel the blank stare crawling across my face to rest on my brain which at that point had reached a glazed state of shut-down. There isn't much that forces you to learn more than being totally immersed in something. All of us acquired a great deal of Spanish.

As the trip was coming to an end, I remember Rick asking what our low points on the trip were and I couldn't really come up with any. I asked my fellow students Liz Gifford and Adrian Berg about favorite experiences on the trip and it was definitely hard for them to come up with just one. The music was one of the first things that came to Gifford's mind. "The people of the Andes played music with such conviction and heart that it seemed as if their immense talent was almost instinctual." Gifford purchased more CDs than any of the other travelers on this trip.

Berg, who had traveled on several of Bellagh's trips in the past, highlighted the experiences surrounding the new traditions during Christmas and New Years. "The cross cultural adventures on New Years were especially enthralling," said Berg. "I met so many interesting and inspiringly friendly people that night. I even taught large groups of people how to say 'Happy New Year' in French."

We went, we observed, we learned, and our lives were truly enriched in one form or another. Once again Bellagh has pulled off another amazing and successful trip. So, thanks to Rick Bellagh, Arlo Midgett and UAS, students were able to do something through school that propelled their educational experience beyond the classroom.