

The Three Musketeers Start Their Peru Journey

After crossing from Ecuador into Peru, about two hours of driving along the beach, we found our first beach campground, where we met other Overlanders: Bruno, from France and a couple from Switzerland. One nice treat has been that in every campground, and even in some cities, Mafe has been able to practice her French... after all, it shouldn't just be about Scott practicing his Spanish!



After some beach camping we rolled into the little beach town of Máncora with almost no expectations. All we knew was that there was a nice Airbnb with a view of the ocean that would be perfect for a few days of work. What we didn't expect was to find so many foreigners wandering around. For such a small desert town, it was full of Americans and Europeans, all looking sunburned. But the biggest surprise? The food. We ate at two outstanding restaurants in Máncora, the quality you'd expect in Lima or Cusco. We had been looking forward to some good Peruvian food, and we found it earlier than anticipated, right in the Peruvian desert.

And yes, desert is the right word. Máncora is dune after dune after dune, and along with the dunes, and the wind, comes the dust. We ended up coated in sand, not just in Máncora, but as we drove south, and truly that became a theme: long stretches of emptiness, dunes rolling into the horizon, and trash lining the desert roads (sadly that did not stop at the border town.)

During our stay in Máncora, we took a detour to Vichayito and found an incredible sea cave, *la cueva de dos entradas* – the cave with two entrances. Leaving the main road felt like stepping off the map. The desert swallowed us instantly into a maze of dunes. The path down was barely a path at all, it was almost like the winding roads of the Andes except that Taco Libre was leaving temporary tracks on the sand, tracks that were taken by the wind. We followed the curves of the dunes until, almost magically, the sand dropped away and the wide, quiet beach revealed itself just for us. (Check out Beach Drive in YouTube link attached below.)



The best part is that we were all alone, just the sea breeze, well, the sea gust, the big waves, clear sunny skies, crabs running around the sand, and us – as our dear friend Fernando calls us, the three musketeers (Scott, Mafe and Taco Libre.) It felt like discovering a little secret pocket of the coast, hidden beneath the cliffs. We walked on the beach, walked through both entrances of the cave, and when the wind was becoming our dinner every time we opened our mouth, we decided to go back to Máncora and have some real protein.

Once we started our drive southbound, we followed an iOverlander recommendation toward a remote beach called Playa de San Pedro. But before reaching the spot, we made one of our notorious detours to Punta Balcones, the westernmost point of South America. Another empty corner of the continent, and again it was another perfect place just for us – the three musketeers, the cliffs, the waves, the wind until we realized we weren't alone after all, we noticed at a distance sea lions sunbathing on a rock.



We climbed to the top of the windy steep cliff to get a better view. Down below, the group of sea lions lounged on the rocks until a few slid into the water, splashing and playing in the surf. As we were leaving and getting back on the road toward Playa de San Pedro, nature surprised us once more: pink flamingos standing in a shallow lagoon. We got back on the road and said goodbye to the sightings of these unexpected creatures.

As Taco Libre was leading the way in the deserted road – about 20 minutes of just thinking it was just the three musketeers, once again, we were wrong, we were not alone, a police truck approached. Our first interaction with the Peruvian police and very different from the interactions we had with the police in Colombia and Ecuador – in both countries we were stopped for “routine checks” and truly, it was the police simply making sure we were okay, we knew where we were going and asking if we needed suggestions or advice. This stop was not that friendly and felt different right away. They were polite but clearly suspicious, they were wondering what two foreigners in an unusual car were doing on a remote dirt road – funny enough, they never asked for our paperwork. After a few tense minutes, that felt like hours, of inspecting TL and asking, what seemed like a million questions, they changed their tone, gave us some advice of where to beach camp and sent us on our merry way.

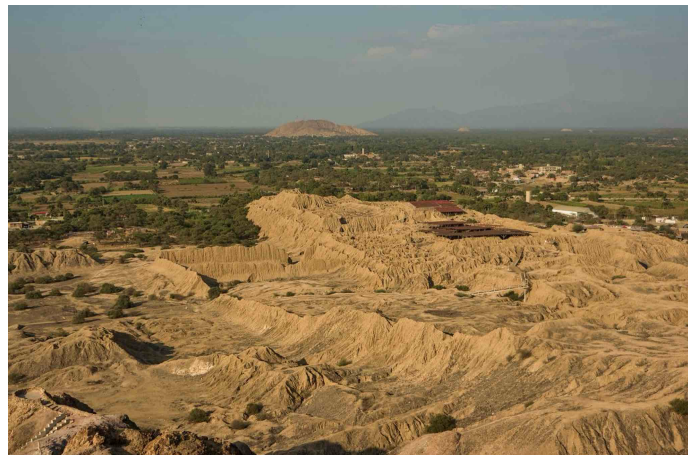


We camped that night completely alone on the beach – this time truly alone: no lights, no houses, just the sound of the ocean and the glow of the stars. It was truly the type of place we had dreamed of, first we found it in Mesa de los *Santos* in Colombia, and then in Playa de *San Pedro* in Perú. Maybe there was divine intervention in us finding these blissful spots.

The next morning, driving toward Chiclayo, we were stopped again by the police, but this time the experience was like our previous encounters in Colombia and Ecuador. These officers were warm, curious, and full of suggestions. One asked where we were headed; another gave us suggestions of where to eat; and one even handed us his personal phone number “*por si acaso*” just in case we needed anything down the road. It reminded us of the last encounter we had with the Ecuadorian police. The day before leaving Loja we were unsure whether we had to exit Ecuador through a specific border town because of the stamp on our Temporary Import Permit. So, we did what mostly Mafe always ends up doing: she asked. There was a small group of national police standing on the plaza, and before we knew it, our simple question had turned into a chain of calls – one officer dialing another, who dialed someone else, until finally we were speaking to a friend of theirs in border patrol who had the answer.

In addition to the Latin warmth, one of the things that we have noticed during our travels is how Peru continues to truly carry its past. Out of all the pre-Columbian cultures we’ve learned about during our trips, like Mayans or Muiscas, the Incas are the ones whose legacy feels the most present. It feels as if every town, no matter how small, has at least one archaeological site tucked into the landscape, revealing another layer of the civilizations that came before throughout the entire country.

We had passed countless sites and made a stop at Túcume, the Valley of the Pyramids in Chiclayo. Spreading across the dry Lambayeque desert, Túcume is a vast complex of adobe pyramids or *Huacas*, 26 in total, rising like ancient dunes frozen in time. From a distance they blend almost seamlessly into the landscape, but up close you can appreciate their scale. These massive structures were built by the Lambayeque civilization, also known as Sicán or Temple of the Moon. These pyramids were later used by the Chimú and the Incas. Túcume was the most outstanding archeological center in the region from 1000 AD up to the arrival of the Incas in 1470 and the Spanish conquest in 1554. Although the Lambayeque dynasty, also referred to as the “Incas of privilege” governed in Túcume, they were subjected to the rule in Cusco.



The most imposing hill in Túcume is the *Cerro la Raya* – the sacred mountain, also called *Cerro del Purgatorio* – Hill of Purgatory – a natural formation, not a constructed pyramid, like the others. It rises sharply with ritual significance, hence the name. This was also the geographic center with the buildings being distributed around it giving the settlement a unique shape in the region. We climbed all the way to the top and found ourselves mesmerized by seeing the many *Huacas* and the surrounding desert. (Check out our YouTube video Túcume)

Our next stop will take us into the Andes, through windy, unpaved roads in search of the cutest bear in the mountains: the *Oso Andino*, or spectacled bear. Keep your eyes peeled for speckles in the next edition of our journey!

November 30, 2025

