

Goodbye Peru: One Last Pisco Before the Desert, and a Toast to Old Friends!

After leaving the beautiful lodge where we celebrated our ninth anniversary and Thanksgiving in Huascarán, our journey toward Lima began. Thanksgiving this year felt even more special, not because of the location, but because we are truly thankful for the opportunity to embark on this incredible adventure.



Almost immediately upon departure, we ran into our first car problem: Taco Libre's tire was losing air. We made a quick stop in Huaraz to have it checked at a local llanteria or tire repair shop. While the mechanic repaired TL's shoe, we wandered through the town. The streets led us straight into a lively market, where local campesinas, with their tall hats, were both selling and buying fresh produce.

After picking up TL with his fixed sole, we started driving looking for a place where we could camp. Huaraz sits at around 3,400 meters (11,150 feet) above sea level, so we wanted to descend a bit and break up the long drive to Lima with a night of wild camping.

On the road, we spotted a sign for a lagoon, Laguna Conococha, with views of the Cordillera Blanca, and we couldn't resist a little detour. The scenery was incredible, and it gave Mafe the chance to get more comfortable with the drone – Scott had been capturing most of the aerial footage until now. As we explored the area around the lagoon, we came across flamingos. It was a gentle reminder that a small detour can lead to unexpected encounters with nature, which we love, as keeping track of animal sightings is one of those personal things we love to do, it is “our thing.”



Continuing on, we approached the town of Santa Rosa and noticed the signs: “Queso, Queso, Queso”—cheese, cheese, cheese—everywhere. We obviously had to stop and try some local cheese. And while we were at it, we were lucky enough to spot vicuñas, Peru's national animal. In case you are wondering, the cheese was DELICIOUS!

We found a remote place to camp by the small village of Raquia. It was solitary, quiet, and just the kind of place we envisioned when we thought about “wild camping.” The evening was peaceful, but promptly at 5:00am a guy came honking his horn wondering if we had been hunting deer. The nice man, not realizing we had been completely startled, insisted we should just go back to sleep and continue resting, which of course, we could not do. So, we got an earlier start and headed out to Lima.



In retrospect, we are grateful for the early wakeup call as traffic into Lima was heavier than usual as the Copa Libertadores de America, a popular soccer tournament that encompasses countries from Latin America, was going on that weekend.

Going into the capital was not just to explore but to reconnect with a friend and, little did we know, to put into practice defensive driving skills – traffic was chaotic, lanes on the road appear to be simply decorative, the “claxon” or honking the horn seems as natural and common as breathing. After a stressful driving experience, we finally got to see our friend from Peru: Diana to us, and Pamela to the rest of the world. We met Diana many years ago in Seattle, even before we were dating! Talking to her was like no time had gone by at all. We met her husband, Renato, and their sweet little daughter, Olivia. They were incredible hosts.



The next day, we went to Parque de la Amistad, which was perfect given that the whole visit was about friendship.

After that, we returned to Miraflores, a place full of memories for us. It was the neighborhood where we stayed the very first time we came to Peru... on our third date. From Miraflores we continued to Barranco, Lima’s bohemian, artsy district along the coast. Everywhere we walked we were surrounded by murals, street art, and we even saw a school parade. It felt very vibrant!

Prior to leaving Lima, we went downtown to visit Plaza San Martín, something we missed on our first trip and would have missed again had it not been for Renato! We found ceremonial guards standing watch in their formal uniforms, just like in Ecuador. But the real highlight was the statue at the center of the plaza. The statue of the woman that was meant to be a Peruvian version of Lady Liberty, created for Peru’s 100 years of independence. And here’s where knowing a local who can give you local tips and anecdotes makes traveling interesting.

Apparently, the mayor had asked the sculptor to include a llama—meaning the *flame* of liberty. But in Spanish, the word *llama* also means, well... llama, the animal. Same spelling. Same pronunciation. So, when the statue was unveiled, instead of a flame of liberty, the woman had on her head an actual llama...



And speaking of language mix-ups, we also learned that in Lima when you park your car, you park it in *la playa*—the “beach” – not the *estacionamiento* or *parqueadero*. So yes, we can officially say that we went to *la playa* in downtown Lima and didn’t even see the ocean. Try explaining that one to someone learning Spanish... oh yeah, Scott was confused when Renato talked about going to *la playa* as we had reached the restaurant for dinner with no beach in sight!



As we were getting ready to leave downtown Lima, we encountered a protest, about six-blocks in length, a truly peaceful protest. Local miners gathered to demand the government give them the same rights as it does to the citizens. We do not know what the issues were, but we were impressed that the protesters were just sitting around, having lunch, making their concerns known in an organized and peaceful way.

Once we left Lima, we continued south toward the Pisco area. Pisco itself is just as chaotic, and to be honest, very loud. Every morning, at 5:45am. sharp, we were woken up by the trash truck driving through town blasting the same song every day. It was a cheerful tune about going to work, taking pride in the town, and promoting tourism. Great sentiment but not at 5:45am! And just when we would fall back asleep, a woman honking a bicycle horn would go by, every morning, selling bread and then another selling tamales. And at night? Parties. Lots of them. Until 5 in the morning. Colombians have the reputation for partying, but honestly... we think the people of Pisco put Colombians to shame – they dance all night, and somehow still function the next morning by 5:45am.

Despite the noise, we enjoyed exploring the coast. Paracas, the little port town, is very touristy with sea lions and sea birds everywhere. Be sure to watch our YouTube video included in this email to see our day tour to the Islas Ballestas, where we got to see the Humboldt penguins, the sea lions, massive bird colonies, and the famous Candelabro geoglyph carved into the hillside.



And of course, we visited the Reserva Nacional de Paracas, with its endless desert that meets the deep blue Pacific, its unique geological formations like La Catedral, its beaches like La Mina and Mendieta, and its surreal landscapes that look like another planet. Be sure to watch our YouTube video of this section as well.

Another daytrip took us inland to Ica, heading straight toward the dunes of Huacachina. We hopped into a Can-Am and flew across the dunes, up, down, and sideways. It was like being on a roller coaster with no tracks. At the top of one massive dune, Scott decided it was the perfect moment to try sand skiing, and he actually skied all the way down.



After the adrenaline, we took things down a notch and followed the Ruta del Pisco, learning about how Peru's national spirit is made. We did a bit of wine tasting too and visited Tacama, the oldest winery in all of South America. It's beautiful, historic, and it confirmed what we had already quietly suspected: Peru should stick to making pisco and leave the wine to Chile and Argentina. The pisco? Fantastic. The wine? Well... let's just say it's an acquired taste. At the wineries, the guides volunteered the following: "Peruvians like beer and sweet wines," as if they knew their wine was not very good.

From Pisco, we continued south to Nazca, one of those places that feels suspended somewhere between history and mystery. Flying over the Nazca Lines was unlike anything we've ever experienced. From the air, the desert suddenly reveals enormous figures etched into the earth: a hummingbird, a monkey, a spider, a whale, geometric lines stretching far beyond what the eye can follow – the famous Nazca lines. No matter how much we read about the Nazca lines beforehand, seeing them from above was something from another world, and, actually they are not from another world, but maybe from a different planet - we left with many questions: How were the Nazca lines made? Why? By whom? The theories of the Nazca lines are many, and the answers remain a mystery. Scott's intuition points towards aliens.



Originally, the plan had been to continue on to Arequipa and then explore Lake Titicaca. But somewhere along the way, we chose something else: time. As we say in Spanish, *del afán no queda sin el cansancio*—nothing good comes from rushing without rest. We decided to slow down, let Paracas sink in, and to save southern Peru for another chapter on our way back north.

Nasca marked our final stop in Peru before crossing into Chile. In the next newsletter, we'll step into an entirely new country, with new landscapes, and stories awaiting just across the border.

PS: If your pet peeve is lack of consistency or misspelling, well that can be found not only on this newsletter but also in Nazca itself, where sometimes it is spelled with an "s" and others with a "z."

December 18, 2025

