

The Adventure
By Wayne Fujioka
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Good morning, everybody.

In early May of this year, four of us from Kauai embarked on a trip to South America to visit parts of Peru, Bolivia, Brazil, and Argentina. Arrangements were made through a Peruvian travel company. The adventure begins.

After a 5-hour flight to L.A., 4 hours to Atlanta, & 7 hours from Atlanta, we arrived in Lima, Peru, which has a population of about 8 M and elevation of about 5,000'. We spent a couple of days in Lima sightseeing with a guide and shopping on our own.

From Lima we flew to Cusco, still in Peru, which has a population of about 350,000 and an elevation of almost 11,000'; we're getting higher up. We visited several sites including Sacsayhuaman which overlooks Cusco, is a former capital of the Inca Empire, and is made of large polished stone walls, with each boulder cut to fit together without mortar or cement. Some of the stones are placed so close together that a slip of paper cannot fit between the stones. The complex was used as a fortress and for ceremonial activities and rituals.

After the first day in Cusco, I had a terrible headache and nausea, and couldn't eat. I thought, what's going on? Oh man, I can't be getting sick so far away from home. The following day, the tour leader insisted and had a doctor come to the hotel where he examined me and decided that we should go to a clinic, where they took some tests and said I was dehydrated, had altitude sickness and an intestinal infection. I was given oxygen and about four IV bottles. After a few hours I was somewhat stabilized to the point that I started thinkinghow long am I going to be here? We're leaving for Machu Picchu tomorrow. Are my valuables (my wallet, credit cards, passport) all still in the cabinet? How much is this hospital stay going to cost? My Medicare and HMSA insurance coverage may not be accepted in this country. How will I pay for it? I kept repeating the Nembutsu and told myself that everything will be O-K. I kept falling asleep and waking up. The last time I woke up, the room was really dark. It was after 7:00 PM. All was quiet. Did they forget about me? What's going on? The doctor finally came in and said I should have some clear soup and wait a couple more hours. So after about 10 hours I was finally released at 9:00 PM. As it turned out, Robert, our tour leader, was the first "angel" or who Carol calls our first *bodhisattva*, or a helper of people, and Dr. Julio and Dr. Pena were the next. By the way, Medicare does not cover medical expenses incurred outside the U.S.

The following day, my nausea and headache were a little better as we took a train from Cusco 50 miles NW to the town of Aguas Calientes. The following morning we took a bus to Machu Picchu which means "old mountain", is at elevation 8,000', and we met our guide for the day. Being there and seeing the complex in person, Machu Picchu is totally awesome. I stood there in complete awe. It was supposedly built in the mid-

15th century, is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, and is included in the New Seven Wonders of the World. It is thought to be a cultural and sacred religious site, built of polished stone. It is thought that less than half of the complex has been restored, and restoration continues.

The next day we were scheduled to fly from Cusco to La Paz, Bolivia, but our Peru travel company said our flight was canceled so we would have to take a bus instead. We later found out that the airline, AeroSur, had gone out of business, similar to Aloha Airlines. We were told not to worry because the bus would take us all the way to La Paz, but after 12 hours on two buses, we only got to Desaguado, a border town to exit Peru and enter Bolivia. So after the 8-hour overnight bus ride, we arrived in Puno and befriended 3 female passengers who were also going to La Paz. Thank goodness that one lady, who was from Colombia, spoke English and Spanish, so we followed her lead. We then took a 4-hour crowded bus ride (about $\frac{3}{4}$ the size of an old beat-up school bus) from Puno to Desaguadero, where we saw Bolivian woman wearing bowler hats.

Needless to say, we weren't familiar with the immigration procedures. After processing out of Peru we walked across the border into Bolivia, found the immigration office that processes Americans, completed the forms, paid the \$135.00 visa fee in clean, crisp American cash, went across the road to have a copy made, returned both sets to the office, all while being closely watched by a Bolivian policeman, and Carol was trying to communicate in English with the Spanish-speaking officials. After we got our visa, at the Colombian lady's recommendation, the four of us from Kauai took a taxi to La Paz, Bolivia. Without the Colombian lady we would have been totally lost in trying to cross the border. She was our fourth *bodhisattva*.

A young local man, who only spoke Spanish, and his pedicab, were our fifth *bodhisattva*. He pedaled our luggage to both immigration offices, told us what we had to do, stayed with our luggage, calmed down the Bolivian police officer for us, took us to convert our American dollars into bolivianos (Bolivian money), and, flagged down the taxi. While we headed on the road to La Paz, in her basic Spanish, Carol was able to communicate with the taxi driver, explained our situation, and convinced him to use his cellphone to call our hotel in La Paz to have someone meet us outside the city, in an area called El Alto, because he refused to drive all the way into La Paz. After getting off the main "highway" and going through some "suspect looking" neighborhoods and dirt back roads, we finally transferred to the waiting hotel shuttle van. I can't tell you how relieved we were to arrive at the Hotel Rosario in La Paz. And after all the doubt we had about our taxi driver (would he take us safely to La Paz or would he take us to an isolated location where his buddies would rob us?), he only charged us 210 bolivianos or \$30.00 USD for the 90-minute one-way trip and making the phone calls for us. I wonder how much gasoline cost there? He turned out to be our sixth *bodhisattva*. I was still really sick with a headache, nausea, and altitude sickness because at 12,000' elevation, La Paz is the highest capital city in the world.

After a couple of days in La Paz, we took a flight south to Sao Paulo, Brazil. For 4-5 days, I had not eaten much, except for a bowl of soup and a few crackers, so I was looking forward to being at a lower elevation and hopefully feeling better. As we tried to

process through immigration in the Sao Paulo airport, we were told that since we didn't already have our Brazilian visas, we would not be allowed to enter the country. We would have to catch a flight back to Bolivia, get a Brazilian visa there, then book another flight back to Brazil. After about 8 hours at the Sao Paulo airport, and with wonderful help from an airline public relations lady named Mary (who spoke English and Portuguese and stayed with us several hours past her work shift) and her supervisor, we were booked on a different airline and flew to Buenos Aires, Argentina, arriving at about 1:30 AM. Mary was our seventh bodhisattva.

We spent the next five days in Buenos Aires and in Puerto Iguazu, location of the amazing Iguazu Falls, which are two times wider and higher than Niagara Falls. Buenos Aires is a beautiful modern city and is called the "Paris of Latin America". You've probably heard of Juan Peron who was president three times, the last in 1974, and his wife, Eva, who was affectionately called "Evita" by their people.

At the Ezeiza airport in Buenos Aires to fly back to the U.S., we were befriended by an American businessman, who had traveled between Buenos Aires and Atlanta many times. He pointed us in the right direction to process out of Argentina, and since he was on the same flight with us, he also talked us through customs/immigration in Atlanta. He was our eighth *bodhisattva*.

Okay, so what, other than, as Carol says, we were experiencing new adventures and making memories. At each hairy incident, I was thinking, somehow we need to get through this, and I had to keep reminding myself to breathe and not freak out. My closest other extremely stressful time was in 1970 as an army field artillery officer in South Vietnam and Cambodia. But, thankfully, a major difference with our trip to South America was that people weren't trying to kill us like during the 11 months in Southeast Asia. In 1970, I was only 24 years young, but today I'm a lot older, not necessarily wiser, and not as resilient. Throughout our South America trip, I thought, "change is constant and each bump is just another new test". The first Noble Truth is LIFE IS SUFFERING, but it is supposedly temporary. All forms of life are impermanent and constantly changing. When we have happiness it's not permanent and is subject to change. Isn't it the same for suffering? I kept thinking, YES, this too will change, will get better, will soon pass. These thoughts, the bodhisattvas, and verbally or mentally repeating the Nembutsu helped get me through. But it sure was nice when we arrived back ON Kauai. Home Sweet Home. NAMU AMIDA BUTSU. Thank you.