Ep #208: Peru with Points: Jess's Trip to Machu Picchu, the Sacred Valley & Cusco



Full Episode Transcript

With Your Hosts

Alex Payne, Jess Field, and Pam Lorg

Points Talk®

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Alex: Wanna hear how Jess knocked out her sixth continent? Her family of four went to Peru, slept steps from the gates of Machu Picchu, rode the luxury Hiram Bingham train, and fed baby alpacas in the Sacred Valley, all using a mix of points and miles and cash. Listen in as she shares exactly how she did it and how you can too.

Welcome to *Points Talk*®. We are three moms who've discovered how to leverage credit card welcome offers to get hundreds of thousands of dollars of travel expenses for nearly free. We've used credit card points and miles to take vacations to places like Hawaii, Paris, Greece, Maldives, Japan, and so much more. And the best part? We each still have 800 plus credit scores. Imagine being able to take the vacation of your dreams for nearly free. It's totally possible, and we're here to show you how.

Alex: Hey, I'm Alex.

Pam: And I'm Pam, Alex's mom.

Jess: And I'm Jess. Let's talk points.

Alex: All right, Jess just got back from a dream trip to Peru. They visited the Sacred Valley, Machu Picchu, and Cusco. She used points for most of the flights and hotels, so the group could splurge on a couple of once-in-a-lifetime experiences. Jess, first of all, tell us how did you plan all this, and then tell us all about the flights.

Jess: All right, so we traveled in mid-October. We were there for fall break, and this trip actually came about in March. And so, if you know me, planning a trip in March for the October of the same year is pretty last minute.

Alex: That's shocking. Shocking, Jess. I cannot believe you did it so last minute.

Jess: So, four of us went on this trip. I already had Peru in the back of my mind because Mayra from her Instagram handle is Worldstompers. She had this Reel about how they took this luxury train to Machu Picchu, and I was like, "Wait a minute, you can take a luxury train? You don't have to hike for four days to get

there?" I'm not hiking for one day, let alone four. So I already had Machu Picchu in the back of my mind.

And then Ted, Ted is like, "I really want to go to South America." And I was like, "So do I. That'll be my sixth continent. We got to make it happen." I contacted Mayra, and I was basically like, "Hey, we have this week in October where my kid doesn't have school. Is October a good time to go to Peru?" And she was like, "Oh my God, October's a great time to go to Peru." And I was like, "Well, am I too late, or can we make this happen?" She was like, "No, I got you. We can make this happen." So, Mayra was absolutely instrumental in helping me book this trip. This is in no way sponsored, no way hosted. I don't get a commission, so you can use her or you can not use her; it doesn't matter to me.

She does sell a Peru guide, like a PDF, if you just want her like if you just want like a good itinerary, but you don't want to pay her to actually plan it, you'd rather do that yourself, or you can just copy my trip and try to do it yourself, and that's free. But you know, I don't know how great I'm going to be at.

Alex: Jess isn't going to book your train and your transfers and your tickets.

Jess: No. If you want someone to book everything for you, like all your transportation, then Mayra is your person, not me. So we flew to Peru. There is a direct flight from Houston to Lima on United. And so we lucked out. The day we needed was available.

Ted has the United Quest℠ Card, which came in clutch for this booking because he got a big cardholder discount. It said that we saved 56% on these flights as a cardholder. So we paid just 27,000 United miles plus $20.60 in taxes each. We flew economy. It's like a six and a half hour flight from Houston, but it was a daytime flight. We left around 4 p.m., arrived around 11 p.m.

There was no time change. It was I think that this is going to depend on where you are in the daylight savings calendar, but for us, when we went in October, Peru was also on the same time zone as Central Time. And so that was huge. To be able to take a six and a half hour flight but have no time change was amazing. So that was our flight to Peru.

We had a few other flights in there. We flew Lima to Cusco, which is a really short flight. It's only like an hour. We flew on LATAM. This flight, for some reason on this day, was so expensive. I have no idea why. I think you can normally find this flight for like $100. For some reason, it was like $250 for each of us. So it was $1,043 for all four of us. That is in premium economy.

I booked this through the Venture X portal to get the $300 travel credit, which brought it down to $743. And I know you're probably thinking, why would you book premium economy on a one-hour flight? It was literally like $15 per person more. So I was like, I'm already spending this ridiculous amount of money. What's $60 more for us to be in premium economy? So it was the typical domestic; like, the middle seat was blocked. But it was nice for us to have the extra space.

And then coming on the coming home, I was able to find the reverse flight, Cusco to Lima, also on LATAM, but booked through British Airways. No one transfers to LATAM, but you can often find really good deals through like Oneworld partners, like British Airways or Qatar. You can also find good deals sometimes through Delta. So check all that out. So it was just 9,500 Avios plus $22.44 each. Again, booked that through British Airways but flying on LATAM economy.

And then coming home from Lima back to the United States, there is a direct flight the other way from Lima to Houston, but it is a red-eye flight. I think it leaves around midnight and gets in at 7 a.m. And I was like, "Absolutely not. I'm not doing that."

Alex: That's, that sounds like torture.

Jess: Yeah. So we flew Lima to Miami. Again, LATAM economy. This was also booked through British Airways. 19,000 Avios plus $88.50 each. For some reason, I booked this flight. I went into the LATAM app to select seats, and it let me choose, like, the economy plus seats. I don't know if that's a fluke or if, like, you can book through a partner and book premium economy. It's worth a shot.

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So British Airways, this was mainly a combination of United miles on the way there, British Airways Avios on the way home. And y'all remember how I got all those Avios from buying Kate Spade when it was 250x accidentally through the British Airways portal. Sorry, Pam, to bring it up again.

Pam: I hope you took her with you. I hope you took that purse with you to celebrate.

Alex: Yeah, it seems like a very good purse for visiting Machu Picchu.

Jess: So, yeah, exactly, for hiking.

Alex: You really should have, though, and like made a Reel about, like, thank you, Kate Spade.

Jess: Thank you. Thank you for your service.

So yeah, so I bought a purse from Kate Spade, and that got me flights for my family of four home from Cusco and Lima. So not a bad deal.

Alex: Jess, how long is the flight from Lima to Miami?

Jess: It was like six. Six or six and a half. It was like six hours. Yeah. I think it was exactly six hours. It's like six hours gate to gate. So you know, you're in the air for a little bit less than that. So yeah, so we left Lima at 1:30 p.m., arrived in Miami at 8:30 p.m.

And then we spent the night at the Hyatt Place Fort Lauderdale Airport for 12,000 Hyatt points. And we flew home the next morning from Fort Lauderdale to Houston on JetBlue. That was 11,900 points and $5.60 each.

So, other than that one flight to Cusco that cost us $1,000 before the $300 travel credit, I was really happy with the redemptions on all of those flights. And so if you're not in Houston, I would definitely look if you're going to have to position anyways. I think Atlanta and Miami are two of the better options, especially if you want to try and book on some of those partner award flights.

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All right, so we landed in Lima around 11 p.m., and then we were departing the next day around 12:30 p.m. So we legit had 13 hours in Lima, decided that we were going to stay close to the airport. I had originally booked the Hyatt Centric, and then I looked at how far away it was from the airport and how bad traffic in Lima could be. And I was like, "Well, we're not doing that." Because by the time we get to the hotel, we're going to have like five hours to sleep and then we're going to have to turn around. So there is a Wyndham Grand Lima; it's not connected to the airport. There's like a passenger walkway, pedestrian walkway that you can walk down, but it's super, super close, like a three-minute walk.

So I booked that. I had originally looked into booking it with Wyndham points, but it's 30,000 Wyndham points a night, and we needed two rooms because there was four of us. So then I was looking around, I actually found the cheapest cash rate through the Bilt portal. And so I booked it through the Bilt portal for $181 per room. And then I turned around, I charged that to my Capital One Venture X card. I turned around and I erased each night with 18,117 Capital One miles.

So, like, instead of transferring 30,000 Capital One miles per room, I was able to erase the exact same room with a little over 18,000 miles. So that just goes to show you that like booking through a portal or booking directly isn't always the worst option. It would have been worse if I transferred and booked directly.

And then breakfast ended up being included with this stay also. And so I thought that was a steal for like 18,000 Capital One miles per room to get, you know, two rooms and breakfast included. So I highly recommend this hotel if you're going into Lima. Like one of the nicest airport hotels I've ever stayed at. So highly recommend it.

Pam: And I second that, Jess. I stayed there too. I was really impressed with it. I think it was probably the first airport hotel that I'd ever stayed in that I go, "Well, this is nice." So yeah, if you're going to Peru, highly recommend that hotel too.

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Jess: All right, so we flew, we spent the night in Lima. We flew to Peru the next day, landed in Cusco, and then Mayra arranged all of our transportation. Okay, so anytime you hear me talk about like us being taken to a hotel or being picked up at the train station or dropped off at the train station or taking a train or taking a bus, Mayra did all of that for me, okay? Because that is my least favorite part of trip planning is figuring out how I'm going to get where I'm going.

Pam: I second that.

Alex: I third that.

Jess: So she arranged a scenic transfer from the Cusco airport to the hotel in the Sacred Valley. Here's another thing where her expertise came into play is that altitude sickness is real in Peru. Cusco is at about 11,000 feet elevation. And so a lot of people fly into Cusco and they stay in Cusco, and then they suffer from really bad altitude sickness because they're not used to being that high up.

So she was like, "What I'm going to do is have you acclimate in the Sacred Valley." It's still high, but it's a little lower. It's around 8 to 9,000 feet, and then once you're acclimated, then you'll do Cusco on the back end. And we really had no issues. Like there was a… we would get a little bit winded, like walking up stairs or walking up a hill, but other than that, nothing. And so I really think this is the way to do it if you're going to do it.

So there was a driver there with my name with our name on it to pick us up from the Cusco airport. We drove to our hotel in the Sacred Valley, and along the way we stopped, we like went to a coffee shop. And he was like, "Are you hungry? Are you thirsty? Do you want some, do you want to go to a coffee shop?" And I was like, "Yes, of course." So we went to a coffee shop outside of Cusco, and then we stopped at this, like, alpaca and llama farm on the way, and the kids got to, like, feed the llamas and alpacas. So it was a great way to break up the drive.

In the Sacred Valley. Okay, so I had originally planned to use Marriott 50k free night certificates or Marriott points to stay at Tambo del Inka. That is a very popular points option in the Sacred Valley. So I'm talking to Mayra and I'm like,

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"Okay, for Sacred Valley, our two nights there, I think I'm going to use Marriott points to stay at Tambo del Inka." And she was like, "Okay, that's fine. But just so you know, Rio Sagrado has baby alpacas on site that you can bottle-feed."

And I was like, "Just kidding, I want to stay there because our family is like huge animal lovers. I knew that would just like make the trip for the kids." So she was able to book us at Rio Sagrado for two nights in two rooms. She got VIP perks through Belmond, but this is also a Fine Hotels + Resorts® or The Edit property. So if you had credit cards that come with, you know, the $300 off fine hotels and resorts or the $250 off the edit, this could if you want to stay here but use some of your credit card perks, that is another option.

So, in conclusion, I would say either Tambo del Inka with Marriott points or free night certificates, or Rio Sagrado with Fine Hotels + Resorts or The Edit property credits. Those would both be great options in the Sacred Valley.

Alex: Let me say when I texted Jess this earlier this week, and I was like, "Did you guys go into Machu Picchu or just outside?" Because you shared nothing about that. But she was texting my mom and I videos of these baby alpacas and making all this content of the baby alpacas. I'm like, "Did you like Machu Picchu, or like was it just the baby alpacas? I'm so confused." Spoiler: she loved Machu Picchu. So give the people the answer to this question because I thought it was really funny and very considerate, very considerate of you actually when you told me why.

Jess: All right, so this week that I was gone, the beginning of the week was great, and then towards the end of that week, when we were at Machu Picchu, the poop kind of hit the fan business-wise with some things that we needed to get done in a very quick manner. And Alex and Pam were handling the brunt of that because I'm in Machu Picchu with like no signal. And this is also when the Southwest changes happened. So there was like business stuff behind the scenes that happened. Southwest came out with their Companion Pass® changes that we did not have any sort of lead time on. We found out when y'all found out.

And so I was like, "I felt bad being like, 'Y'all are scrambling to get all this done.'" And me being like, "Here I am in Machu Picchu. Look at me. Look how pretty this view is." So I kept those videos to myself. And I was like, "I'll tell them about that when I get home, and the dust has settled from all of this."

Alex: Well, it was funny because the alpacas had been before everything went bad. And so, anyways, I was like, "Okay, that actually makes sense and was very considerate of you." But I was glad to know you did like Machu Picchu.

Jess: Yeah, but as I was sending Alex these videos of the alpacas, she was like, "You have to make a Reel about the alpacas. I don't care what the Reel says. I don't care if it doesn't have anything to do with credit cards. You have to make a reel." So I actually made a Reel that was like, "You go to Peru for Machu Picchu, but the alpacas steal the show and like little clips of all the alpacas."

Needless to say, if you have animal lovers in your family, I 100% think that Rio Sagrado is worth it purely for the fact that you can feed the alpacas there. And they're just like wandering around. Like they would, like, follow us to our rooms. And I was like, "They're so cute. I just want to take you home."

All right, so we did two nights there, and then we got picked up and dropped off in at the train station to take the train to Machu Picchu. This was the luxury train that I had seen Mayra make the Reel about. She booked these tickets for us. We did take… I'll talk about in a little bit. We took a little bit more of a budget-friendly option back so that I could, you know, I was like, "I got to do research. I have to do research on both."

And so the train there, it's a luxury train. You get like a three-course meal, beef tenderloin, alcohol's included, there's live music. It also includes a guide. It includes your tickets to Machu Picchu and the guide for when you get to Machu Picchu. It was a shared tour, but there was only seven people total on our tour. And so it was fabulous. Loved it.

It was around $500 a person. So you are looking at, like, you know, an investment on this experience, but it was truly like a once-in-a-lifetime experience for us. And I'm so glad I splurged on it because I think that it was

100% worth it. They also gave us, like, a water bottle and a, like, a crossbody bag that we could bring into Machu Picchu. Amazing. 10/10, no notes. Highly recommend the Hiram Bingham train to Machu Picchu. So we stayed overnight outside the gates of Machu Picchu, which was another, like, pinch-me, dream come true moment.

You can stay, there aren't any points options outside the gates of Machu Picchu. There's one option. It's Sanctuary Lodge. It was our biggest splurge of the trip. Again, Mayra booked it, so we got her VIP perks. It is technically an Edit property, but with The Edit, you have to spend, there's a two-night minimum. I don't, I would not personally spend two nights here. I don't think you need two nights. And so I would either splurge with cash, or there is a Mr. and Mrs. Smith property in Aguas Calientes, which is like the little town at the bottom of Machu Picchu that you have to take the bus up to Machu Picchu from. Inkaterra is the name of it.

So if you want to use points, you could stay at Inkaterra with Hyatt points, but then like I said, you would have to like wake up in the morning, take the bus up to Machu Picchu versus like we did, we just walked out of our room and we were at Machu Picchu, which is amazing that we could do that.

One thing I forgot to mention is so when you take the train to Machu Picchu, you can only bring like a little overnight bag on the train. You cannot bring any sort of bag with like, you can't bring a checked bag. You can't, I couldn't even bring my, like, Away Bigger carry-on, right? So Mayra was able to have all of our luggage transferred from the Sacred Valley to Cusco, and it was a $100 fee. But to me, that was worth it to not have to worry about our luggage. So they just transferred our luggage from Rio Sagrado to our next hotel in Cusco. It was $100, totally worth it. So we just brought our overnight bag on the train to Machu Picchu.

And then when we got off the train, there was someone from Sanctuary Lodge collecting people's bags, and they delivered those straight to our room at Sanctuary Lodge, and we went straight to Machu Picchu. So this is like a well-oiled machine with how this all works between the hotels and the trains and the other hotels. And so I was pleasantly surprised with the logistics of all of it.

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Okay, so we spent one night at Sanctuary Lodge. Like I said, you're paying for the location of the hotel, literally steps from the entrance to Machu Picchu. The rooms themselves aren't anything special, but it's full board, and so it includes all your meals; alcohol's included. And so that was great.

And then the other thing is Sanctuary Lodge was basically our insurance policy because I was like, "I don't want to go all the way to Machu Picchu, get there, and then it's like cloudy, and you can't see anything. And like that was my one time to see Machu Picchu," right? Because I've seen these Reels on Instagram where people are like, "I traveled all the way to Peru and look at my view," and it's like a mountain covered in clouds, right?

Alex: You can't even see the mountain. It's just clouds.

Jess: Yeah, you're in the mountains, and the weather is unpredictable, right? Like, looking at the weather on your weather app is pointless because it can change so quickly. So that was the other thing is I was like, "I want two chances to visit Machu Picchu just in case on the first day, we can't see anything." So that was another reason why we booked Sanctuary Lodge.

So we got entrance tickets on the first day through the Hiram Bingham train. We did circuit two. If you've never been to Machu Picchu, you need a timed ticket, and you need to choose which circuit you want to take. And so it's very complicated. Again, another reason why I hired someone to do this for me because I didn't trust myself to figure it out on my own.

And then Mayra booked us 7 a.m. tickets for circuit one C the next morning. And this is one where we had this entire circuit to ourselves. It is a climb. Two in our… I won't name names, two in our group of four turned around and went back to the hotel about 10 minutes into this because they were like, I can't climb all like it's too it was it's very much like an uphill climb the whole way, right? And so the teen and I persisted. We walked. I was like, "I came to Machu Picchu and I paid for these tickets, and we're going all the way to the top."

Alex: You're like, "I hike seven hours in the Dolomites. I trained for this."

Jess: No, this was a piece of cake compared to the Dolomites. And the hike down is like totally fine and easy. It was just the hike up in the altitude that was like a little bit dicey at the beginning. But we had this circuit to ourselves. It was 7 a.m. Machu Picchu in general was more crowded than I was expecting at 7 a.m., but once we got on to this path, literally the only ones there.

So if you're willing to splurge on a night outside the gates of Machu Picchu, we loved Sanctuary Lodge. The deal is like, so we went the first day and the weather was perfect, and we saw everything. And so it's like hindsight's 2020. Like if I had known, "Okay, we're going to go, and it's going to be perfect," would I necessarily have needed to spend the night and go back the next day? No. But I didn't know that at the time. You know, like, so I appreciated having two days to go and two different times of day. The first day we went was like two in the afternoon; the second day was 7 a.m. And so we had two different days, two different times of day where we were going to have options to experience Machu Picchu.

Alex: Jess, what do people do if they're not staying at Sanctuary Lodge? Is it you take the train back?

Jess: I personally wouldn't take the train all the way to Cusco. I mean, if you if you leave from Cusco and go back to Cusco same day, that is a very long day because it's like a three and a half hour train ride each way, plus, you know, the three to four hours that you want to spend at Machu Picchu. It is doable. I would not do it.

If you're going to take the train, I would either stop and start in the Sacred Valley. Like we started in this from Sacred Valley, it's about an hour and 45 minutes. So you're talking like Sacred Valley to Machu Picchu, that's an hour and 45 minutes, you know, three to four hours in Machu Picchu. You could then take the train back to the Sacred Valley. It's still going to be a long day.

I think if it were me, if I weren't going to stay at Sanctuary Lodge, I would do like I said and stay at Aguas Calientes, which is the town where you just have to take like a 15 to 20 minute bus to Machu Picchu. That's what I would do if I weren't going to stay at Sanctuary Lodge. I would spend one night in Aguas

Calientes and still get two days out of Machu Picchu, but it's not quite as much of a splurge, and you can use Hyatt points since it's a Mr. and Mrs. Smith property.

Alex: Okay, cool.

Jess: So then after our night at Sanctuary Lodge, we took another train. This train we took to Cusco. And so this was like, it was supposed to be a three and a half hour train ride. It ended up being like five hours because the train broke down. We took the Vistadome train.

Alex: You're like, "This is what I get for the budget one."

Jess: This is what I get for trying to do research. This is a more mid-tier option. And so this one was around $150 a person. There's an even more budget-friendly option than this called the Expedition. I thought the Vistadome was fine. I mean, it's $150 versus $500 on the Hiram Bingham. But you're also not getting, you know, you're not getting the tickets to Machu Picchu, you're not getting the guide included. You're getting water. All that was included was water. You could purchase drinks or snacks for a fee. But, you know, Hiram Bingham is like quiet and peaceful, and like service is amazing. And this is just like what you would expect from a generic train ride, you know?

Alex: So it sounds like one is a train ride, the other one is an experience.

Jess: Experience, yes. The other thing that was, I was dying at this. Okay, so the Vistadome is also very much like if an introvert was a person, it would be the Hiram Bingham, and if an extrovert was a person, it would be the Vistadome. Because, so we've been at Machu Picchu, right? Like it's 7 a.m. I climbed a freaking mountain, and then Southwest issued their changes. And so I'm like sitting at Machu Picchu making a carousel post for Instagram. And like it's just been a long day, right? And so I just want to get on the train and, like, close my eyes and listen to a book and chill. They're having like a fashion show where the people are modeling different, like, alpaca clothes down the runway of the train. They're having, like, live music playing really loud. Everyone's like drinking. And I was like, "Oh my gosh, get me off this train."

Alex: And then it breaks down.

Jess: And then it broke down, and it took five hours instead of three and a half. And so I don't, yeah, I mean, I think it, you know, you're paying 150 bucks a person. Like I said, it was fine. While the train was broken down and we had no cell service and they were out of water and soda, I was thinking, "I really wish I was on the Hiram Bingham right now." But, you know, if your goal is to save money and take a more affordable option, it was fine. So that is my takeaway from the train experiences.

So then we get to Cusco. Mayra arranged someone to pick us up. They pick us up, and they take us to our hotel in Cusco, which I booked with Marriott free night certificates. We stayed at Palacio del Inka. And so we stayed there for two nights. Again, we needed two rooms. And so for room one, I redeemed two Marriott 50k free night awards. This is an amazing use of these free night awards if you have some of those that you want to use. One night was 51,000 points; one night was 52,000 points. And so I just had to top up both nights with just 3,000 Marriott points, which is incredible. So that was for one room.

For the second room, this is also a Fine Hotels + Resorts property. And so I booked one night with Ted's Amex® $300 Fine Hotels + Resorts credit, and then I booked the second night with my Fine Hotels + Resorts Amex business credit. So we ended up saving $600 on two nights. It was like $400 a night. So we paid $200 out of pocket for two nights, which I thought was great.

And then I got, I have Marriott Platinum Elite status from holding the Bonvoy Brilliant® card. So two of us got free breakfast with my Platinum Elite status. Two got free breakfast with the Fine Hotels + Resorts credit. So we all got free breakfast. We got $150 credit at the spa, which I gladly used for a deep tissue massage. It covered the entire massage. And so I thought this was such a great way. Like, whether you have Fine Hotels + Resorts credits or whether you have Marriott points or Marriott free night certificates, you can make a stay here happen. Amazing location, amazing hotel. The service all over Peru was incredible. The people are so kind. And so, highly recommend Palacio del Inka for your Cusco stay.

There was also just hot tip. There are like laundry places all over Cusco, and there happened to be one right across the street from the hotel. So we took all of our laundry there, and they washed it and folded it and delivered it back to the hotel for us, and it was like $28 that we paid. And so that was another amazing thing.

We only had one full day in Cusco. We did an Airbnb experience walking tour. Y'all know those are my favorite. It was around a three and a half hour tour. I will link to it in the show notes, but it was great. It ended up, I didn't book a private tour, but we ended up being the only four people on the tour. Our tour guide was Aaron. He spoke amazing English and he was like so knowledgeable about Cusco and its history and the architecture. And so we had a really great time with him. We went to some markets; we went to like different viewpoints around the city. We covered a ton of ground. And so, highly recommend him to do a walking tour if you are in Cusco.

I'm also going to link, I left, I left this out, but I'm going to link when we were in Sacred Valley, we did horseback riding. So three of us went horseback riding, and I will link that in the show notes also because it's a really great little excursion. I do not have- I've probably ridden a horse like three times in my life ever. And so I am by no means a horseback riding expert, but we booked like the one-hour beginner-friendly ride around the Sacred Valley, and it was great. The guide was great. It was a really great experience. And so that's another option for like something to do in the Sacred Valley if you're staying there.

Alex: So, were you- was it seven nights total that you were gone? How many nights in Peru?

Jess: Six nights in Peru.

Alex: Okay.

Jess: And then one night in Fort Lauderdale. So it was like seven nights total, but six in Peru. So we did one in Lima, two in the Sacred Valley, one at Sanctuary Lodge outside of Machu Picchu, and then two in Cusco.

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Alex: And it felt like it was enough time for you guys?

Jess: It felt like, yeah, it felt like it was enough time for what we did. It was one of those where, like, at the end I was like, "Oh, that was great. Like, that was a great amount of time. I didn't feel too rushed, but I also didn't feel like we were here for too long."

When I first talked to Mayra, she was like, "Oh, you should go on, like, this Amazon River cruise." And I was like, "Well, can we make that work with the week I have to work with?" And she was like, "No, you really need like 10 days to be able to do that." So I wasn't able to do that because, you know, we're working around school and work schedules. But if I went back to Peru, I would love to do an Amazon River cruise.

And the other thing I forgot to mention about Sanctuary Lodge is it is currently, so the land that the Sanctuary Lodge is on is owned by the Peruvian government. Belmond leases it from them. It's currently, you can book it through March, I think till March 2028. After that, the fate of Sanctuary Lodge is uncertain because I heard that the Peruvian government wants to turn it into a museum. And so if you want to do Sanctuary Lodge, I highly recommend booking it before March 2028.

And that's what I said to Ted. I was like, "This is literally a once-in-a-lifetime stay for us because this hotel may not exist in like a year and a half. It may be gone, you know?" And so that's just, you know, if you want to splurge on a night there, you may want to do it sooner rather than later. They may extend the lease, but it doesn't seem like it's going to go that way.

Alex: And then when is the best times to visit?

Jess: So the dry season is April to October, rainy season is November to March. So if you want to go like we went at the end of the dry season, which was great. The most crowded time is the summer, obviously, when everyone's out of school. So, like June, July, August, is the most crowded time.

So when I was talking to Mayra, she was like, "April, May, and September, October are really great sweet spots because they are not in the high peak travel time, but they're also in the dry season." If you can go in April and May, April, May, September, or October, I think those are probably your best options.

Alex: And then as far as vacations go with kids, where does this kind of fit? I know it's really hard to give rankings because every place has its own special thing. But for you and Ted and then the kids, what was their thoughts of Peru?

Jess: I thought they were at really great ages to be in Peru. So one is 13, one is 22. I personally would not take, like, someone was like, "Would you take a toddler?" And I was like, "Absolutely not." Like you need to be, in my opinion, it is not stroller-friendly. You need to be fully independent of strollers. I mean, you know what, you can do whatever you want. You know your kids best. Would I have taken my child as a toddler? Absolutely not.

You know, it's a lot of walking, and so you want a kid that is able to walk long distances, walk uphill. I would say like eight years old would probably be my minimum for a trip like this. But again, you know your kid best. And they both loved it. They the horses, the alpacas, the llamas. We saw llamas inside Machu Picchu just like walking next to us. They loved it. They thought Machu Picchu was amazing.

And that's the other thing is like we took a three-hour guided tour through Machu Picchu, learning a lot of history and architecture, and you want your kid to be able to, I definitely think you want to do a guided tour for at least one of the circuits, and you want your kid to be able to not run all over Machu Picchu while you're trying to enjoy the tour.

Alex: Yeah.

Jess: So they were both at ages where, like, they can enjoy that, and they thought it was really, really cool. Do I need to go back to Machu Picchu? Probably not. You know, it's one of those things where, like, you've seen it, you've learned the history, like I don't feel the need to do that again, but like I'm certainly glad I checked it off my bucket list, and I know that the kids loved it too.

Ep #208: Peru with Points: Jess's Trip to Machu Picchu, the Sacred Valley & Cusco

Pam: Okay. Well, Jess, I enjoyed your report so much. I've been there too. I loved it. And I'm with you. It's, there's just some places where it's like, "Oh, I'm so glad I went there, but I don't need to go back there."

Alex: Did you do the Amazon River cruise when you went?

Pam: We did do the Amazon, yeah, and we went up to Lake Titicaca. Yeah, and that's where the altitude sickness just killed us. I mean, we had been, you know, we thought that we would have been used to it from, you know, Machu Picchu and being in these other places, but by the time we got there, we actually had to use oxygen bottles at night just to, it was just the nauseousness. It was just, that was bad. So anyway, so great trip.

The thing that's amazing is that Jess was able to cover nearly every flight and half of the hotel nights in Peru with points and miles, and that saved her group thousands of dollars, letting them splurge on the Hiram Bingham train. So jealous. I think that looks so amazing, and also a night at the Sanctuary Lodge right outside of Machu Picchu. Again, that seems really amazing. And it was continent number six. Way to go, Jess.

If you enjoyed today's episode, please share it with a friend you'd love to see Machu Picchu with. Thanks so much for your support.

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