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Coming from a culture in Arizona that has a strong indigenous culture, and which was also influenced by Spanish exploration, I was curious to see what parallels might exist in Peru. The historical influences impact modern culture as well as the economy, so this question intrigued me. What I discovered is that there were indeed overlaps, but that Peruvian culture retained much more of its deeper historical characteristics than did my home state. The three major stops in the trip—Lima, Cusco, and the ecolodge of Posada Amazonas, all had distinct cultures that reflected their own unique histories with modern influences. And I loved every one of them!

The first stop of Lima showed the most modern influences. While the center of the city revealed its colonial past, the suburb of Miraflores where we lodged resembled thriving modern cities similar to others in growing economies. One thing that struck me in Miraflores – on the wonderful cliff trails – was the rich multicultural influence in the area. Besides its colonization by the Spanish, Lima had waves of immigrants from China, Japan, and European nations other than Spain. The seaside trail had memorials to Chinese and Japanese immigrants and the role they played in Lima and the surrounding area—as laborers and leaders. The immigrants influenced the culture—including the food! I made sure to experience this influence by checking out a Chifa restaurant which melded Peruvian native ingredients like potatoes and chiles with Chinese ingredients like ginger and soy sauce—delicious!

Also in Lima I was struck by the layout of the city. While Miraflores had thriving restaurants, shops, hotels, and casinos, it also had pockets of houses and bodegas that were in disrepair. Looking out of the rooftop breakfast windows on the top floor of our hotel, I noticed a building across the street that had some floors that were occupied and others which were dilapidated and with loose wiring, and crumbling walls. The view reminded me that Peru has a

developing economy in which some people – and businesses – are well off while others do not have sufficient funds to have safe housing or sufficient food. I know this is also true in the United States, but it seems to be less integrated into one area. Perhaps zoning laws influence this, but the weaving together of high-priced properties next to much lower priced real estate seemed unique.

This impression of disparity hit me like a ton of bricks when we visited our first school. The public school on the outskirts of Lima had classrooms that had metal walls, no doors, and a dirt courtyard. The leader of the school paid for the internet herself, and the school had one computer and one printer. Despite this, we saw learning taking place and joy and laughter with the students. Their instructors kept their classrooms organized and with clear lessons – they seemed to know their students well and expressed great care for them. Posters celebrating father's day were prevalent throughout the school and the school director told us that the local community regularly comes onto the campus to volunteer for cleanup and repair of facilities. The contrast between this and a private school was dramatic. The lack of resources available to the public school really shocked me and again reminded me that economies that have the ability to educate their citizens have a greater chance of success. Those people who have less access to education have less chance of escaping poverty.

Our visit to the Peruvian Central Bank shed tremendous light on the economic situation in Peru. Economist Marco Vega's discussion clarified the positive economic indicators as well as some of the challenges facing the Peruvian economy. I was completely surprised to learn that people in Peru can open bank accounts and have their money immediately converted to dollars. It made sense to me that people would want to attach their earnings and savings to stable currencies, but it said a great deal that the Peruvian institutions would facilitate this. It made me wonder how the Peruvian economy could add confidence to its own currency if people could so easily move their money elsewhere, but Mr. Vega explained that this was viewed in their system as just being a stop in the road to developing a more stable Peruvian economy. I

think this will be a great teaching point with my students—stability and prosperity in an economic system do not happen overnight.

Our second location of Cusco offered a number of profound learning experiences. First, high altitude is a challenge! I marveled at how the indigenous people could thrive in such a dry, mountainous area, creating amazing agricultural solutions to their dry climate. The charming town also seemed to perfectly balance its history (preserving narrow old streets with SO many stairs) with modern amenities for travelers from all over the world. Their shops offered local artisan gifts with a wide variety of price points. Hotels and restaurants also showcased the local fare with awareness of international travelers who visit the town – I was really impressed with how Cusco seemed to preserve its character while catering to the thousands and thousands of people who visit every year. I also admired the pride the local people exuded for their culture. They were so welcoming and excited to showcase the amazing history of the area. Our guide at Machu Picchu reveled in showcasing the inventions of the Incas as well as delighting in explaining to us the improvements the government has made in preserving the area while still being able to welcome tourists from around the world. Since the pandemic, the government has streamlined the bussing from the local town of Aguas Calientes and the ticketing to the area. I think it was another lesson in the tradeoffs and opportunity costs for the area—one I will certainly share with my students. (That and how AMAZING the Machu Picchu site is! Simply stunning.)

Our final destination, Posada Amazonas, may have been the best of all. Certainly the visit itself checked so many bucket list ideas for me, but it really drove home the concept that places with unique resources can capitalize on their situation without ruining what they have. Learning about the partnership between the Ese Eja Community and the Rainforest Expeditions company proved to be a fascinating study in how a partnership can be mutually beneficial to the stakeholders involved. I thoroughly enjoyed hearing our guide Oscar explain how Posada Amazonas developed from being a waystation for the research community on the Tambopata

River to becoming an eco-resort. The fact that the site still hosts research about the rainforest as well as being a beautiful lodge run primarily by members of the local community gives a unique example of a business partnership. What a great idea they had to use “citizen scientists” (us!) to help gather tiger moths in an effort to discover new species in the area. The goals of both partners in the ecolodge remained at the forefront—research while preserving the local wildlife. Additionally, the lodge provides employment and leadership opportunities for the indigenous community. The experience at the lodge will serve as a tremendous teaching point for me—as a model partnership as well as a tremendously successful example of how focusing on unique resources and developing them to meet the needs of the community can be accomplished. Importantly, it was also great fun to be in the rainforest, even if the humidity nearly wilted this desert dweller.

I want to thank the Global Economic Education Alliance for continuing to sponsor travel experiences for teachers. There is no better teacher than experience and the trip to Peru tremendously broadened my understanding of how developing economies can find successes in focusing on unique resources they have. It also sharpened my understanding and empathy for those who struggle with poverty and the lack of opportunities that I, and my students, may take for granted. I have a new love in my life – Peru, its friendly, generous people, its amazing history and varied cultures, its vast (and humid) rainforest, and, of course, its llamas. They are amazing. But, not as amazing as John Brock and Claudia Sicoli. What treasures they are! – dedicated economic educators, caring humans, and ambassadors for travel as the best teacher. Thank you, thank you for this wonderful learning opportunity.