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ATLAS MYSTERIUM

Dear Mr. Kensington,
As we discussed over dinner, I
have sent you a copy of just one
location I intend to expose in my
Atlas Mysterium. I truly believe
that the world is more mysterious
than ever and that Prospero
House would greatly benefit from
an atlas in its repertoire.
Let me know what you think!

R.W.

SOUTH AMERICA: PERU

Located on the west coast of South America, the Republic of Peru is the third-largest country on the continent and home to almost 5 million people. It is most famous for its historical ties with the Incan Empire, which ruled most of Peru from the 14th to 16th centuries.

Prior to the rise of the Incas, Peru housed a rich collection of civilizations, notably first emerging around 2500 BC with great pyramids and ceremonial sites appearing from as early as 2100 BC. The Chavín cult is a source of many artifacts and temples, especially those dedicated to the Smiling God and the Staff God, whose court was attended by 14 eagle-like creatures. Unfortunately, many of these artifacts are worth more melted down as gold than for their archaeological significance.

The Incan empire fell in 1572 when Francisco de Toledo executed the last remaining Inca, Tupac Amaru, and the Viceroyalty of Peru was created. The Viceroyalty lasted until the early 1820s, when general José de San Martín invaded from Argentina and Chile. Since then, various coups and battles have been fought, with the most recent

democratic election resulting in a coup last year to prevent political volatility.

For much of its Spanish history, Peru has been the world's provider of *guano* (bat excrement), which is attributed to be the major source of prosperity in Peru.

The majority of Peruvians speak Spanish, although there are many groups who speak the traditional languages such as Quechua and Aymara. English is not widely spoken, especially outside of Lima.

As currency, Peruvians use the sol. There are 10 dineros to one sol, and 10 centavos to one dinero.

Capital City: LIMA

Lima was founded by the Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro in 1535. The city currently has a population over 200,000 and is in rapid economic development following years of steady decline. The city (and nearby bay) straddles the Rímac District, and has recently been merged into the nearby town of Callao. An extensive network of electric trams have recently been established in the town providing local transit. Buses, although they are less

reliable than the trams, are also available.

Local temperatures are mild but humid for most of the year.

Where to stay

Luxury hotels are few and far between in Lima. There are two main hotels that service international travelers.

Hotel España

A delightful, 12-room establishment, the Hotel España is not much to look at from outside but boasts a traditional two-floor Spanish foyer with natural sky light. Each floor is painted differently and adorned with Spanish art and sculpture.

Hotel Maury

The Hotel Maury's pisco sours are almost worth a trip to the city by themselves. Larger than the Hotel España, the Hotel Maury has an excellent banquet hall and excellent bar that makes time in Lima a very pleasant stay.

What to eat

Lima is relatively new on the international travel scene and many of the dishes are quite traditional.

Cerviche, which is a dish of fresh fish marinated in limes and rocoto peppers, is best eaten for breakfast or lunch.

Escabeche is a must-try if you are traveling to Peru. Spicy, sweet, and sour, this dish is traditionally served cold after the fish is "cooked" in hot vinegar.

A popular street food is anticuchos—cow heart grilled to perfection. The hardest part about these delicacies is eating only one.

Lima: Things to Do

Museo de Arqueologia y Antropologia: If you are having trouble finding your way through all the historically significant sites in Peru, a trip to the Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology of the National University of San Marcos in Lima is essential. Housing dozens of artifacts from all across Peru, this museum is well worth the time.

Plaza de Armas: This square is where you'll find some of Lima's most breathtaking colonial architecture. It is also the site where Francisco Pizarro established the city of Peru.

San Francisco de Lima Basilica and Convent: A gorgeous architectural

phenomenon in its own right, this basilica is well worth the time to explore, for underneath the narthex are buried no less than 25,000 bodies, each arranged in various patterns and styles reminiscent of the famed Parisian Catacombs.

Greater Peru: Things to Do

Amazon Rainforest: Nearly 13% of the Amazon rainforest is located in Peru and is home to countless dangerous species and many uncontacted indigenous tribes. A fantastic site for lovers of biodiversity and forgotten (and undiscovered) civilization!

Lake Titicaca: The highest navigable lake in the world, Lake Titicaca is split between Peru and its neighbor, Bolivia. Many new archaeological sites are being discovered even today around the shores of Lake Titicaca. If you do visit, make sure to explore the floating islands constructed by the Uros people. The most significant city on the shores of Lake Titicaca is Puno.

The Lost City of the Incas: Any budding archaeologist will be able to tell you about this city, which the Quechua people call "Old Pyramid" or "Machu Picchu". Discovered by Hiram Bingham III in 1912, this is one of the most

significant sites for Incan anthropology. Tourists have died traveling to the site due to its extreme elevation and dangerous path, so be sure to take it slow and manage altitude sickness.

Stories and myths

Peru is a hotbed of traditional myths and stories, and each of these differ depending on the region that you find yourself in.

In the Amazon, you'll hear stories of a whistling creature known as El Tunche. This evil spirit of the forest is a tormented, evil soul, twisted by hate. The whistling of the Tunche announces the death of the listener. Local legends say that if you hear the whistling of the Tunche, it is best to run to a safe place immediately.

To the South, in the Andes, you'll hear the story of the Muki, the King of the Mines. Like Rumpelstiltskin, the Muki make dangerous deals with unwitting people inevitably leading to a grisly demise.

Another story popular throughout Peru is the story of the pishtaco, a ghoulish creature who seeks out native Peruvians to kill them. The white-

skinned pishtaco is said to consume the fat of their victims and slice them into pieces and sell them on the street, so be careful when buying escabeche. In reality, though, these creatures are believed to be legends created by the brutal attacks of Spanish conquistadors on the local populations.

Finally, we have the story of Sarah Ellen, who was executed in 1913. Indeed - in 1913, a merchant ship from Europe docked in Pisco and delivered a sealed, lead-lined coffin. Inside the coffin, a dead woman. Some say she was a witch, others say she was bitten by Dracula herself, but she had certainly been found guilty of witchcraft in England where she was from. She was executed in England and shipped to Peru, and on her death she swore she would return in 80 years. Who knows what will happen then?