

Machu Picchu now more wheelchair accessible thanks to travel company

By Smithsonian.com, adapted by Newsela staff on 02.15.19

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Image 1. Machu Picchu, also known as "The Old Mountain," is an Inca city in Peru. A travel company called Wheel the World will offer travelers specialized wheelchairs that can traverse difficult terrain such as this wonder of the world. Photo: Wheel the World

The dazzling Inca city of Machu Picchu, built nearly 8,000 feet above sea level atop Peru's Andes Mountains, is made up of sprawling terraces, narrow lanes and more than 100 flights of stairs. More than 1 million tourists make the challenging trek through Machu Picchu each year. Now, people who use wheelchairs will also get a chance to experience this world wonder.

The travel company Wheel the World will soon offer the first-ever wheelchair-accessible tours of Machu Picchu.

The idea for Wheel the World began in 2017, as co-founder Alvaro Silberstein began making meticulous plans to hike the Torres del Paine National Park in Patagonia. The region is known for its mountains and brilliant blue icebergs. It spans the countries of Argentina and Chile, with the Andes Mountains as its dividing line, and is at the tip of South America.

Team Is Ready For The Challenge

Silberstein, who uses a wheelchair, assembled a team that included mountaineers and disabilities experts. He also raised \$8,000 to buy a specialized trekking wheelchair for the hike, which he donated to the park after his trip so it could be used by other people with disabilities.

Silberstein was then a student at Berkeley Haas School of Business at the University of California. He teamed up with friend and classmate Camilo Navarro to launch a company that would make other similarly beautiful but rugged terrains accessible by wheelchair.



Already, Wheel the World offers a number of tours in Mexico and Chile, from where Silberstein and Navarro hail. The new Machu Picchu experience marks the company's first venture into Peru. A four-day trip costs around \$1,500, including hotel stays but excluding airfare, on par with non-accessible tours. There is also a single-day Machu Picchu tour, which costs \$990.

Trekking Through The Site Is Not Easy

Ancient sites like this one often cannot be modified with accessible infrastructure because of preservation concerns, so providing the proper equipment is key. Partners donate specialized chairs to Wheel the World.

The company uses the Joëlette trekking wheelchair, which is "designed with only one wheel and two long sticks that make it look like a wheelbarrow," Navarro said. "It is a mix of steel and aluminum, like a bicycle, so it's light." The chairs cannot be self-propelled, but assistants and trained guides are on hand to help lone travelers.



As is true for any visitor looking to see Machu Picchu up close, trekking through the site might not be easy. However, it is now possible for tourists in wheelchairs to do it, as Silberstein showed when he and a woman named Isabel Aguirre became the first travelers who are quadriplegic and paraplegic to make the ambitious 7-mile journey up the mountain last year. People who are quadriplegic have all four limbs paralyzed. Those who are paraplegic have paralysis of their legs.

During "many exhausted moments we wondered if we would make it," Silberstein said at the time. However, he added, "seeing Machu Picchu from on high was probably the most beautiful moment in my life."

Quiz

1 Read the list of sentences from the article.

1. *The dazzling Inca city of Machu Picchu, built nearly 8,000 feet above sea level atop Peru's Andes Mountains, is made up of sprawling terraces, narrow lanes and more than 100 flights of stairs.*
2. *Ancient sites like this one often cannot be modified with accessible infrastructure because of preservation concerns, so providing the proper equipment is key.*
3. *The chairs cannot be self-propelled, but assistants and trained guides are on hand to help lone travelers.*
4. *As is true for any visitor looking to see Machu Picchu up close, trekking through the site might not be easy.*

Which two sentences taken together provide the BEST evidence to support the idea that visiting sites like Machu Picchu is especially challenging for tourists in wheelchairs?

- (A) 1 and 2
- (B) 2 and 3
- (C) 3 and 4
- (D) 1 and 4

2 Read the statement below.

Silberstein's own love of adventure led him to create Wheel the World.

Which sentence from the article provides the BEST support for this statement?

- (A) The idea for Wheel the World began in 2017, as co-founder Alvaro Silberstein began making meticulous plans to hike the Torres del Paine National Park in Patagonia.
- (B) He teamed up with friend and classmate Camilo Navarro to launch a company that would make other similarly beautiful but rugged terrains accessible by wheelchair.
- (C) However, it is now possible for tourists in wheelchairs to do it, as Silberstein showed when he and a woman named Isabel Aguirre became the first travelers who are quadriplegic and paraplegic to make the ambitious 7-mile journey up the mountain last year.
- (D) During "many exhausted moments we wondered if we would make it," Silberstein said at the time.

3 Based on the article, which of the following statements BEST represents Silberstein's approach toward making rugged and remote sites accessible?

- (A) Silberstein is particular about which kinds of trekking chairs people use to access the sites, refusing to work with any company except for Joëlette.
- (B) Silberstein is working with partners and experts to make accessibility as affordable as possible, even donating his own chair after a trek in Patagonia.
- (C) Silberstein is excited about the potential of his company to bring access to sites around the world, spreading quickly to multiple continents.
- (D) Silberstein is meticulous in his planning of the treks and his work with historic sites, even lobbying them to add more accessible ramps and paths.

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Why did the author conclude the article by quoting Silberstein's experience reaching the top of Machu Picchu?

- (A) to illustrate that the extreme effort it take to reach such sites is not for everyone
- (B) to reiterate the idea that Machu Picchu is the ultimate experience for tourists of ancient sites
- (C) to illustrate why he believes it is particularly meaningful to make such locations accessible
- (D) to elaborate on his relationship with Isabel Aquirre, who accompanied him on the trip

The Inca created a mighty empire that lives on

By Heather Pringle, National Geographic, adapted by Newsela staff on 04.05.19

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Level 1050L



Image 1. Women shepherds on Taquile Island of Lake Titicaca, Peru, tend to their flock. Conquering this region of Peru was crucial to the ancient Inca's military success. Photo by: Education Images/UIG/Getty Images

Many of the people who live on the island of Taquile in Peru are descendants of the Inca colonists sent here more than 500 years ago. Most still keep to the old ways. They weave brilliantly colored cloth, speak the traditional language of the Inca and tend their fields as they have for centuries.



There, the names of powerful Inca rulers still ring with power and ambition centuries after their death: Viracocha Inca, Huascar Inca and Pachacutec Inca Yupanqui. The royal Inca dynasty to which these men belonged created the largest pre-Columbian empire in the Americas.

Until recently, scholars possessed few clues about the lives of Inca kings. Now archaeologists are making up for lost time. They are combing rugged mountain slopes near Cusco, the cradle of Inca civilization. Thousands of previously unknown sites, including the lost estates of Inca rulers, have been discovered. On the frontiers of the lost empire, archaeologists are piecing together dramatic evidence of the wars Inca kings fought and of the way they ruled.

The Inca State Started Earlier

U.S. archaeologist Brian Bauer has long been interested in the origins of the Inca Empire. When he began his studies in the 1980s, most historians believed that a brilliant, young Andean named Pachacutec became the first Inca king in the early 1400s. They believed he transformed a small collection of mud huts into a mighty empire in just one generation. Bauer didn't buy it. He was certain the Inca dynasty had far deeper roots, and was determined to find proof.

So Bauer began exploring the Cusco Valley. He and his team marched up and down the steep mountain slopes carefully recording every pottery fragment or toppled stone wall they came across. Their careful, methodical work paid off. Bauer eventually discovered thousands of previously unknown Inca sites. This new evidence proved the Inca state had risen much earlier than previously believed — sometime between 1200 and 1300.

The ancient rulers of the region, the mighty Wari, had fallen by 1100. In part, this was due to a severe drought that afflicted the Andes for a century or more. After the Wari fell, local chiefs across the Peruvian highlands battled over scarce water and led raids into neighboring villages in search of food. Forced out of their homes, the villagers fled to freezing, windswept hideouts above 13,000 feet.



The Empire Takes Root

Things were different in the fertile, well-watered valley around Cusco, however. Inca farmers there stood their ground. Instead of splintering apart and warring among themselves, Inca villages united into a small state capable of mounting an organized defense.

At the same time, temperatures in the Andes started to become milder. As temperatures climbed, Inca farmers moved up the formerly icy slopes. They planted crops along stepped terraces, irrigated their fields and reaped record corn harvests. This abundance of food led to a growing population. In time, Inca rulers could call up more soldiers than any neighboring chief.

Inca kings soon began eyeing the lands and resources of others. They struck marriage alliances with neighboring lords, and handed out generous gifts to their new allies. When a rival lord stirred up trouble, they flexed their military might. In all the surrounding valleys, local lords gave in one by one, until there was only one mighty state and one capital, the sacred city of Cusco.

Inca kings then turned their attention to the wealthy lands surrounding Lake Titicaca. Sometime after 1400, one of the greatest Inca rulers, Pachacutec Inca Yupanqui, began planning his conquest of the south. It was the dawn of the empire.

Pachacutec Attacks

The Titicaca region was controlled by the Colla. Their lords ruled as many as 400,000 people in kingdoms spread around the lake. Their lands were rich and desirable. Gold and silver veined the mountains, and herds of alpacas and llamas fattened in lush meadows. Military success in the Andes depended on such livestock. Llamas were the only draft animal on the continent, and could

carry 70 pounds of gear on their backs. If the Inca king could not conquer the Titicaca lords who owned these vast herds, he would live in fear of the day these lords would come to conquer him.

In the mid-1400s, two mighty armies gathered on a high, cold Peruvian plain north of the great lake. On one side was the army of the Colla, which bristled with battle gear. Pachacutec scanned the enemy ranks in silence, preparing for the great battle ahead.

Suddenly, Pachacutec issued the order to attack. Playing panpipes carved from the bones of enemies and war drums fashioned from the skins of dead foes, his soldiers advanced toward the Colla forces. Then both sides charged. At battle's end, Colla bodies littered the landscape.

In the years that followed, Pachacutec and his descendants defeated all the southern lords. However, military victory was only the first step in the Inca's empire building. Officials next set about establishing civil control over the many different ethnic communities scattered throughout their empire.

Machu Picchu Is One Of Many Inca Masterpieces

If provinces mounted resistance, Inca rulers deported the locals and replaced them with loyal subjects. Residents of remote villages were moved to new Inca-controlled towns. These towns were erected along Inca roads — roads that sped the movement of Inca troops. Inca governors ordered the construction of roadside storehouses for those troops. Then, local communities were commanded to fill the storehouses with provisions.

Under Inca rule, Andean civilization prospered as never before. Inca engineers transformed fragmentary road networks into interconnected highways. Inca farmers mastered high-altitude agriculture and grew some 70 different crops. Often, three to seven years' worth of food would be stockpiled in vast storage complexes. Inca masons constructed architectural masterpieces. Some, like Machu Picchu, continue to awe visitors today.

The Inca Built Grand, King-Like Estates

By the time the Inca king Huayna Capac took power around 1493, little seemed beyond the reach of the Inca dynasty. To bring grandeur to his new capital in Ecuador, Huayna Capac put more than 4,500 rebellious subjects to work hauling immense stone blocks all the way from Cusco. The stones were dragged a distance of nearly a thousand miles up and down steep mountain roads. Meanwhile, in the Inca heartland, a small army of men and women toiled to construct a royal estate for Huayna Capac and his family. At the king's bidding, they moved the Urubamba River to the southern side of the valley. They leveled hills and drained marshes, then



planted corn and many other crops. In the center of the estate, they laid stones and bricks for Huayna Capac's new country palace, Quispiguanca.

Quispiguanca was encircled by parkland, fields and gardens. It was a retreat from the world, a place for a warrior-king to unwind. Here Huayna Capac entertained guests in the great halls of his palace.

Quispiguanca was not the only spectacular estate. Each new Inca king built a city palace and country home for himself and his family shortly after assuming power. To date, archaeologists have located the ruins of roughly a dozen royal estates built by at least six Inca kings.

Even after these kings died, they remained the powers behind the throne. "The ancestors were a key element of Andean life," says Sonia Guillén, director of Peru's Museo Leymebamba. After Huayna Capac died around 1527, retainers mummified his body and carried it back to Cusco. Members of the royal family frequently visited the dead monarch. They asked his advice on important matters and heeded the replies given by an oracle sitting at his side.

A Teen King Comes To Power

In the year 1533, thousands of people packed into Cusco's main plaza to celebrate the arrival of their new teenage king. Two years earlier, Spanish invaders had landed in the north, bearing deadly new weapons. The Spaniards had taken the Inca king, Atahualpa, prisoner. Eight months later, they executed their royal captive. In 1533 the leader of the Spaniards, Francisco Pizarro, picked a young prince to rule as a puppet king. His name was Manco Inca Yupanqui.

It was Manco Inca who was being installed that day in 1533. The crowd watched as the royal teenager was carried into the square, along with the mummies of his ancestors. The mummies reminded all that Manco Inca descended from a long line of kings.

In the months that followed, the Spanish invaders seized the palaces and country estates of Cusco. They took royal Inca women as their wives. Greatly angered by this, Manco Inca rebelled in 1536 and tried to drive the Spanish from the land. When his army suffered defeat, he fled Cusco for the jungle city of Vilcabamba, from which he continued to launch attacks. The Spanish wouldn't subdue this stronghold until 1572.

Great Kings Are Buried In Secret Somewhere In Lima

During those war-torn decades, the Inca's sprawling network of roads, storehouses, temples and estates began slowly falling into ruin. As the empire crumbled, the Inca made a valiant attempt to preserve the symbols of kingly authority. Servants collected the precious bodies of the sacred kings and concealed them around Cusco. These hidden mummies were worshipped in secret — and in defiance of Spanish priests. In 1559, Cusco's chief official, Juan Polo de Ondegardo, resolved to stamp out this practice. After a lengthy search, the remains of 11 Inca kings and several queens were tracked down and seized.

For a time, the mummies of Pachacutec, Huayna Capac and two other royals were put on display for Europeans' amusement. But the damp coastal climate caused the bodies to rot. So, Spanish officials buried the greatest of the Inca kings in secrecy in Lima, far from the Andes and the people who loved and worshipped them.

Today, no one can say where Peru's greatest kings lie. Brian Bauer, the American archeologist, believes this is tragic. "Can you imagine," he asks, "how American citizens would feel if the British had taken the bodies of the first several presidents back to London during the War of 1812?" Perhaps one day this injustice will be righted, and the royal Inca mummies will be returned to their descendants.

Quiz

1 Read the following selection from the section "Machu Picchu Is One Of Many Inca Masterpieces."

Under Inca rule, Andean civilization prospered as never before. Inca engineers transformed fragmentary road networks into interconnected highways. Inca farmers mastered high-altitude agriculture and grew some 70 different crops. Often, three to seven years' worth of food would be stockpiled in vast storage complexes. Inca masons constructed architectural masterpieces. Some, like Machu Picchu, continue to awe visitors today.

Which word from the paragraph helps you to understand that Andean civilization had lacked organization before Inca rule?

- (A) prospered
- (B) fragmentary
- (C) stockpiled
- (D) masterpieces

2 Read the following paragraph from the section "A Teen King Comes To Power."

It was Manco Inca who was being installed that day in 1533. The crowd watched as the royal teenager was carried into the square, along with the mummies of his ancestors. The mummies reminded all that Manco Inca descended from a long line of kings.

Why did the author use the word "installed"?

- (A) to emphasize the sense that he was controlled by the Spanish
- (B) to emphasize the strictness of the ceremony to become king
- (C) to convey the honor being paid to him by Spanish invaders
- (D) to convey the admiration of the people for his youthful wisdom

3 Which section from the article BEST explains why archaeologists now have a better understanding of the Inca Empire?

- (A) Introduction [paragraphs 1-3]
- (B) "The Inca State Started Earlier"
- (C) "The Inca Built Grand, King-Like Estates"
- (D) "Great Kings Are Buried In Secret Somewhere In Lima"

4 Read the paragraph below from the section "The Empire Takes Root."

Inca kings soon began eyeing the lands and resources of others. They struck marriage alliances with neighboring lords, and handed out generous gifts to their new allies. When a rival lord stirred up trouble, they flexed their military might. In all the surrounding valleys, local lords gave in one by one, until there was only one mighty state and one capital, the sacred city of Cusco.

What conclusion is BEST supported by the paragraph above?

- (A) Rival lords never actually became loyal to the Inca kings of Cusco after they were defeated.
- (B) Lands and resources were divided evenly among the local lords after they were taken.
- (C) The Inca used social strategy as well as warfare to defeat their rivals and build their empire.
- (D) Marriage alliances were more successful than gifts at keeping the city of Cusco united.