

Here's my Study Abroad Story

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**SIT Peru: Indigenous Peoples and Globalization
Cusco, Peru**

Major: Linguistics and Spanish (dual)

Program: The SIT program in Peru aims to give students an immersive, experiential understanding of indigenous-related issues. Though based in Cusco, students spend a significant amount of time visiting other regions, such as the southern highlands and Amazonian jungle. Accommodation is almost exclusively in home stays to offer students the most culturally relevant experience and classes are taught by a variety of specialized speakers and program directors. In the final month, students pursue a self-designed Independent Study Project (ISP) relating to the program theme. It's a truly wonderful, immersive, and perspective-changing experience!



In the traditional dress of Tupe, where I spent my ISP

Typical Day: While in Cusco, my wakeup time was somewhere between 6-7:30 am, depending on whether I was feeling crazy enough to brave a run at over 12,000 ft. elevation. After breakfast, I would meet up with other SIT students for the 15 minute walk to the SIT center. From 9am-12pm, we had language class and from 3pm-5pm we had a seminar class, with topics ranging from indigenous anti-mining movements to traditional medicinal knowledge. Between classes, I usually went home for lunch with the family, eating copious amounts of rice, quinoa,

squash, beans, meat, and corn. In the evening, I often went to my parents' café in the central *plaza*, where I did homework, chatted with the cooks in the kitchen, or mingled with customers.

Highlights: I lived and breathed some amazing highlights during my stay in Peru. I remember walking alongside my host mom high in the alpaca herding community of Callalli as she taught me the Quechua names and uses of local herbs. I remember learning about rainforest preservation efforts from the Amazonian residents of Yarina. I remember laughing as I danced with residents of Taquile Island in Lake Titicaca, struggling to keep my traditional clothes in their correct positions while weaving under and around the other dancers. And most of all, I remember the time I spent on my ISP in the Andean community of Tupe: the stunning beauty of the terraced mountains, the warmth of conversations with my adopted, 74-year-old *Tía* (aunt), and the amazement I felt at the strength of community members, who fight with such determination for the future of their language.

Challenges: The cultural immersion that I experienced on SIT Peru was both the most rewarding and the most challenging aspect of my semester. At times, it was hard to come to terms with the realities of local communities and approach the issues they face in a positive, solution-building manner. Working on my ISP for the last month was also challenging, because it entailed or-



ganizing my own research, immersing myself in a community where I knew no one, and writing the longest paper I had ever written. Nonetheless, these processes are probably the most life-changing and personally rewarding I have ever experienced, and I would highly recommend them to every liberal arts student!

Advice: Jump in over your head! Speak in Spanish. Laugh at your mistakes; laughter is universal and making mistakes is the best way to put others at ease. Look for the things that unite you with other humans: love, family, basic needs, conversation, and FOOD. Try new things fearlessly (be willing to take a bite of that guinea pig!). Most of all, ask questions and listen to the voice of those who have such a rich knowledge to share. You will leave half your heart abroad, but don't worry...it will have grown sufficiently to compensate for the tear.