J&M4-17

We are in the Sacred Valley in the town of Ollantaytambo in a hotel called El Albergue.
It smacks of Fawlty Towers without the comedy.

The smoke alarm system obviously gets tested at 01:40 and finishes at 02:00. We don't know if this effects everyone but in room 17, our room, the bloody thing chirps really loudly every thirty seconds for those twenty minutes…. We reported the situation to the manager and received a shrug of shoulders.

The hotel El Alburque sits right on the station platform. Get off the train, walk six feet and open the door. Properly convenient one might believe but the train drivers like to use their whistles endlessly and sit in the station with thundering great diesel engines pouring out soot and smoke that fills the whole place with pollution.

I think it must be a single track because the stationary train cannot move until the next train arrives. It then pulls out and the new when pulls forward into a siding, switches track and pulls back into the station. The result is a continual pall of smoke and part burnt diesel fumes from a poorly maintained monster engine.

The hotel fills with these to the point of choking.

On the plus side. The railway employees take on something not seen on British railways ever… As passengers start to board, they are led into the platform by a group of traditionally dressed locals, dancing, singing and waving flags and symbols.

This delightful spectacle is tempered slightly when rain forces the dancing conductors to wear plastic poncho's over their costumes.

Hiram Bingham. It's widely believed that this British explorer re-discovered Machuppichu and brought it to the world's attention. It transpires the a group of German explorers got there first and looted most or all of the treasure. Bingham's method of archaeology seems to have been rather drastic too. Once he discovered some of the walls, he realised that the city was beneath a layer of vegetation so…. He set fire to the whole thing.

In this hooligan‘s honour, there is a train named after him, one of the most expensive per mile anywhere. The cost of a return Custco to Ollantaytambo is about £1000. It's very nice, chandeliers et al but it's just a slow stinky diesel train…..

Moray sink holes and Marsal salt

Today we've taken a tour of the Sacred Valley. Including the Salt mine at **Marsal** and **Moray** sink hole that actually became the Inca’s horticultural experimental gardens where new species of plant for example 3000 different potato species. Although only about 150-160 are regularly grown now, the rest are still stored in seed banks.

The MorSal salt mine isn't really a mine at all. The salt comes from deep underground, carried out on a hot water spring. This brine is fed into evaporation lakes which the sun then dehydrates. The salt is then raked up by hand, sifted and filtered then resolved in water again, removing the garbage and dehydrated again. The product is world renowned quality.

Still, it's not really a mine in the normal sense.

Our guide today has been Armandito, we last saw him when touring Cusco. Smashing individual with a l ready wit and very knowledgeable but always wants to know more.

Tomorrow, another early start, collected at 5:00 to drive back to Cusco to then catch a train to Titicaca for a couple for days. 10:30-11:00 hour train ride. Substantial but supposedly some entertainment eñ route.