J&M4-19

Our train ride ends in Puno. The last mile or so is through the local market. The train roof clears the market stalls roof's by no more than six inches perhaps less on either side and in consequence movement is stalagmite slow.

Many faces look up at the passengers smiling and waving, particularly but not exclusively the children and we all wave back.

Finally arrived in Pono, completely enervated at 6:45 but had to wait until 7:00 for the luggage to be off-loaded. Usual mêlée trying to get out from under people all relieved to have arrived to the extent that they stand statuesque as if awaiting further instruction.

We were met by Carmen and Ruben the driver who grabbed our bags and got us out of the station and to the floating Hilton. Not sure the Hilton is actually floating but it's on a floating island about 30 minutes out of town.

The oddest sensation is that one can still feel movement. Much like when you've been aboard a small yacht for a few hours , you sway when you get back on land. The same happens after a long and rocky train journey. And that was rocky.

I don't think I'd like to do that again. It had the hallmark of luxury travel but from a bygone era that has never been maintained. Once upon a time it would have been the way the wealthy travelled but that was probably a century ago and nothing has been updated since.
Silly things like the loo seat isn't attached. The armchairs fixed to the floor are tatty and torn and quite frankly damn uncomfortable after an hour let alone eleven.
The staff are all very enthusiastic and provide entertainment by the carriage. The performance takes place in the observation car right at the end of the train. Lovely idea but has to be done in stages or more accurately coaches. Fifty odd seats per coach, everyone gets corralled back to the observation Acar where a five piece plays, a couple of staff do a fashion show and then leads the dancing. Everyone is offered a drink and takes pictures of a long straight railway track exuding from under the train wheels and then you are asked to return to your carriage and seat so that the next group can repeat. Must be hard on the performers to keep that fresh.

That was yesterday……
Today we're in Titicaca in the Hilton by the lake with magnificent views. The sun is shining.
I have discovered during this trip that I don't sleep well above about 10,000 feet. And that's where we are.
However, as stated, it's a lovely sunny day and we will make the most of it.

We are due to take a boat ride, a kayak ride, have lunch with a local family then get back to the hotel, pick up our bags and get to the airport for 5:45. The rush is due to airport maintenance leading to flight changes.

Ruben is our guide today, excellent fellow, lots of fun and knowledge. We are driven down to the harbour and board our boat. When I say our boat, it's just us. The captain, the guide and J & me. The boat takes 15-16 but there's two. Makes no economic sense.

Anyway, first stop, floating island. These places are extraordinary. Literally piles of reeds floating on the water, build your house in top. When the reeds rot or become waterlogged, pile on more reeds. They last about three weeks so almost a constant cold wet job replacing them or rather, adding to them… Another layer gets spread around on top.
Talk about a tenuous existence, if they don't keep cutting and adding reeds, they sink. Simple as that.
The real dilemma is that the lake is shrinking. It's losing about a metre per year! Consequently, the reeds on which their lives ultimately depend are in shorter and shorter supply.
It's like walking on a big sponge and water is just below the surface.

Jess and I took out a kayak from this floating home. It was a pre-ordered excursion and we nearly didn't do it. **Before we really realised what was happening, they had pulled out the kayak, strapped us into life jackets and splash decks, sat us down into the two man yacht and pushed us out into the water…..**
As it happens, we fell straight back into the routine as if it wasn't 25 years since we paddled before. We had been worried about Jessa's wrist but it seemed to stand up to it well. We didn't go far, half or three quarters of a mile maybe. It felt great to do it and without any real concerns. There were other boats out there with us too so it occasionally got a little rough.
We returned to the launch and were pulled up onto the floating home and clambered out.

We said our thanks and farewells to our hosts and took a slow ride out onto the lake proper. The boat, would have been at home in an Amsterdam canal, was slow and steady though I suspect short of a front/mid skeg. Captain Miguel was constantly steering left and right with his Toyota car steering wheel to keep heading. Major swings not just minor corrections. Full turns of the wheel…. Also appeared not to have a reverse gear. He was older than time so forgiven.

We landed the other side of the peninsula probably five or six miles, initially through Reed channels then out into the open lake. Took about an hour ànd a half to get across then about a mile hike up to where we had lunch. Followed by a brief demonstration of hand spinning.

We wandered back to the boat that had in the meantime relocated to a stone harbour. Then back to our departure harbour, through the crowded streets. They have a big celebration going on tomorrow so this is the preamble to that, lots of high schoolers practicing for the big day.

We had about 20-30 minutes to grab our bags for an unexpectedly long journey out to Juliaca airport. We were thinking it was just a part of Puno but it took over an hour through terrible roads and speed bumps every ten yards. (So it seemed) 😂

We had an hour to wait but otherwise the rest was pretty clockwork therefore uneventful.