

Unit 10: City in the Clouds

Narrator: Machu Picchu is an ancient city hidden away in the mountains in South America. Located northwest of Cusco, Peru, Machu Picchu was constructed by the Inca people over 500 years ago.

At its most powerful, the Inca empire stretched about 2,500 miles along South America's Pacific coast, from modern-day Ecuador down to Chile. This distance is nearly the horizontal width of the United States.

Machu Picchu once stood at the center of this empire, and today, it is one of Peru's best-preserved archeological sites. It is also an impressive example of Incan engineering. In Machu Picchu, the Inca built grand palaces, plazas, and temples out of stone. And they did this without using wheels or metal tools. One special aspect of its construction is the way the Inca built walls. They did not use any sticky substance to make the blocks of stone stick together. Instead, the stones were cut so precisely that they fit together tightly.

Machu Picchu is located on two fault lines, so there are often earthquakes there. But because of the way the stones were cut, during an earthquake the stones in the walls move slightly, and then fall back into position again. This is perhaps why the ruins are so well-preserved.

Although local communities knew about Machu Picchu, it remained unknown to the outside world for hundreds of years. Even the Spanish, who invaded the Inca's lands in the 16th century, never came across the site. It wasn't until 1911 when Melchor Arteaga, a local farmer, showed the site to Yale University Professor Hiram Bingham, that the ruins of Machu Picchu became known to the public. Bingham and other explorers after him spent much of their lives studying Machu Picchu and learning more about the Inca empire.

In 2007, Machu Picchu was voted one of the new Seven Wonders of the World. Today, visitors from around the world come here to walk in the footsteps of the amazing Inca people.