

Mission trip to Peru a great success

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After 18 hours of travel, 44 weary travelers from Puget Sound Adventist Academy stumbled into a misty airport in Iquitos, Peru. We peered out of windows fogged with humidity to get our first glimpse of where we would be spending the next 14 days on a mission and travel adventure with the People of Peru Project.

15 years prior, POPP founder Paul Opp's heart was touched by those he met in Iquitos' streets. For him, seeking a way to lend aid to the city's needy, especially the children, became the catalyst for a life mission in the area. We too would soon feel the pull of Peru's beautiful people as we interacted with them in a variety of ways. From construction to clean up, painting to playing with neighborhood children during VBS, our time in Iquitos was graced by the gratitude, enthusiasm, and hospitality we encountered. It was as refreshing as a daily afternoon downpour after a sizzling day's work.

Achieving construction projects during rainy season is always difficult. However, while waiting for things to dry did affect our progress, morale was high and it was an added blessing that our last day was completely clear, allowing us to make quick work on the five project sites. By the end of the week, foundations for new buildings had been poured, a riverboat painted, and upgrades made to the POPP's Poppy's House, a home for young girls. Our mission group had worked diligently though rain, mud, and the heat and accomplished much with an equal amount of laughter.

Despite our busyness by day, everyone's favorite hour was when it was time to hop aboard our rattly bus, with its magical maximum capacity, and bump our way to VBS for the evening program. Like so many happy clowns, we tumbled out at the community center, right into the excited, waving, and waiting arms of the Iquitos children. Enthusiastic singing, storytelling, and games ensued, all put on by PSAA students. Spanish students had a chance to put their skills to use, and did a great job leading out and interacting with our VBS kids, whose number grew to almost 100 by the end of the week.

Saying goodbye to Iquitos, we embarked on the second phase of our adventure—a journey into the Amazon, followed by a trek to Machu Picchu. Challenged, enamored, and awed by these excursions, the diversity of experiences we had was so impactful. Every person on the trip has personal stories that tell of the positive influence intrinsic to mission. While we served the people of Peru, in the end we returned home blessed by them in ways that transcend time and distance. The reason why is evident: that's how love works.