

A homestay experience in the Parque de la Papa

By Lindsey Masterman

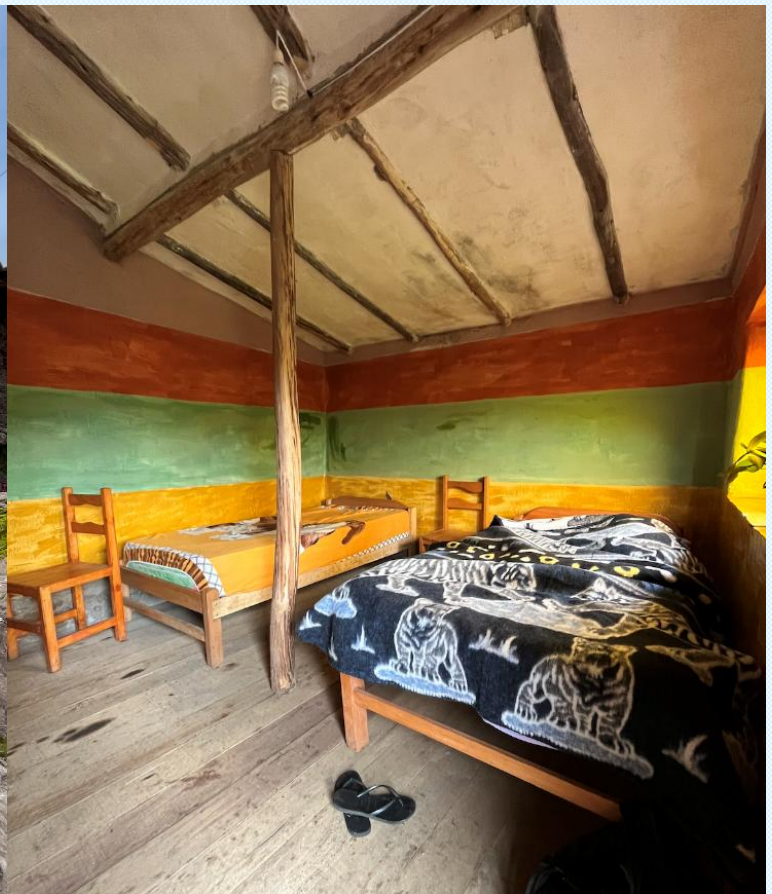


For 3 days and 2 nights I was welcomed into the home of Rosa in Paru Paru where I stayed while learning more about the Parque de Papa. The Parque de Papa is an association of five Quechua communities which together form a Biocultural Heritage Territory that works to preserve indigenous farming practices and over 1,400 native potato varieties while protecting the Andean landscape and developing strategies to adapt to climate change.

Rosa's home is in Paru Paru, one of the communities that makes up the Potato Park, which sits at an altitude of over 16,000 feet. During the short time I stayed with her, I was able to participate in the preparation of typical family meals, go on some beautiful hikes in the mountains and lakes that surround her home, and play with her two children Carmen (3 years old) and Maria (12 years old). Although not always perfectly comfortable, (it can get cold at night!) rural living proved to be a wonderful and enriching experience. Despite a significant language barrier due to the family speaking only Quechua, I was able to observe, communicate about, and experience a way of life that was completely different from that which I am used to.



Rosa's house in Paru Paru



My bedroom at Rosa's house

Meals proved to be very central to family life, taking hours to communally prepare and consisting of many plates. They were prepared over a *concha*, a ceramic surface with three holes cut from it under which a fire is lit to form a traditional Andean stove. For dinner we would have some sort of snack, such as fried pieces of maize or potatoes cooked underground, tea, potato soup, and a plate of vegetables from Rosa's greenhouse, more potatoes, and protein such as quinoa or some meat. Breakfast was no

less extravagant, consisting of a hot drink like *cebada* (a sweet and nutty drink made from barley) or *avena* (a sweet and milky drink made from oats) with bread, and a soup or plate of potatoes, pasta and fried trout caught from the nearby lake. Going hungry certainly should not be a concern of someone considering a homestay experience, as Rosa generously provided me with more food than I could hope to finish!



A delicious meal with my homestay family



The alpacas returning home in the evening

After dinner activities included feeding leftover food to the four adorable two-week-old puppies that live in Rosa's backyard, the most incredible star gazing of my life due to the clear skies and lack of light pollution, and enjoying the company of Rosa's herd of alpaca which return to the property each night after a day of grazing in the mountains' fields. Then, it would be off to an early bedtime in my private room which consisted of a simple bed with lots of blankets in order to prepare for the day ahead. Walking in Paru Paru with Rosa

I was lucky enough to be able to attend the meetings of the collectives that are a part of The Potato Park during the day. In the mornings after breakfast, Rosa would walk me to my meetings before her day's work. The ease with which she led me along hidden trails and across rivers with impeccable directional sense was as impressive as the beautiful vistas through which we traveled. Overall, I'm very grateful to have had the opportunity to participate in a homestay. I would recommend the experience to anyone who is willing to step beyond their comfort zone in order to gain an authentic glimpse into the traditional ways of life that indigenous Andean people maintain, and make some truly unforgettable memories!

Lindsey recently completed a BA in Organizational Studies and Business Administration from the University of Michigan, where she concentrated in sustainability and corporate social responsibility. She is particularly interested in sustainable food systems and climate change. She spent a week working with Asociación ANDES and the Parque de la Papa, aiming to learn more about sustainable farming and collective climate action.