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Santander scholarship report

I used my £1,000 Santander scholarship to help pay for a four-week trip to Cusco, Peru, so that I could conduct fieldwork on Andean textile production for my MA dissertation in Latin American Interdisciplinary Studies.

I flew to Cusco from Newcastle on 27 July 2010, arriving the following morning, and left on 26 August, spending two days in Lima before flying home on 29 August.

During my four weeks in Cusco, I attended back-strap weaving classes at the Center for Traditional Textiles of Cusco (CTTC), which works to revive traditional textile production by providing training and a sales outlet for the weaving associations of nine local communities. I took part in a CTTC weaving day at the local community of Chinchero and accompanied the CTTC Director to a weavers' meeting in Chahuaytire, where I then stayed on for two nights with a local family. I also stayed overnight with a weaving family in Pitumarca, who took me to a local wedding. These family stays gave me an opportunity to talk to weavers and watch them at work, as well as to join in household activities and hike in the surrounding countryside. Subsequently, I joined the leader of the Cusco-based Bartolomé de las Casas textile project, which provides training and sales assistance to seven weavers' associations in Cusco province, on a day trip to Choquecancha, where I met members of the weaving association and observed celebrations of the founding of the Choquecancha peasant community.

In my spare time, I visited textile markets in Cusco, Chinchero and Pisac, Cusco museums such as the Museo del Inka and the Santa Catalina, Santo Domingo, Korikancha and CTTC museums, and the Inca remains at Pisac, Sacsayhuaman, Q'enqo, Ollantaytambo, Tipón and Machu Picchu. I joined the research library of the Universidad Andina operated by the Bartolomé de las Casas NGO in Cusco, where I was able to read manuscripts and specialised publications on Andean weaving traditions. I participated in Andean ceremonies such as ritual offerings to the earth mother to ensure a good growing season and a ritual offering by a Cusco family to ensure harmony and prosperity for their household. Lastly, I reciprocated the advice and help of CTTC by translating into English a 2,000-page report in Spanish on a CTTC project for growing local indigo plants to use in wool dyeing.

All these visits and fieldwork provided me with invaluable information not only on practical aspects of the art of Andean weaving but also on the historical and contemporary place of textiles in Andean lives. I was able to observe how traditional textiles reflect Andean culture and traditions, agriculture and the landscape, as well as the Andean worldview, and how Andean textile production fits into the local and broader economy.

My trip would not have been possible without the £1,000 Santander scholarship, which covered over half the cost of my air travel to Cusco, leaving me to cover my remaining travel costs and living expenses.