

# Hiking to Machu Picchu past sacred Inca peaks

By GIOVANNA DELL'ORTO  
Associated Press

SALKANTAY PASS, Peru — Our hiking group had reached the highest point of our trek through the Andes to Machu Picchu. Now our guide was leading us in a Quechua ritual. We took turns placing stones in an “apacheta” pyramid over herbs and bits of chocolate bars, offering them to Apu Salkantay, the spirit of the mountain sacred to the Incas. Its ice-covered peak shone above us, spotlighted by the sun.

Three days earlier in Cuzco, the region's gateway city, I had watched hundreds of people carry glittering statues of Catholic saints in procession around the main plaza, past rippling Baroque churches and whitewashed houses with carved wooden balconies. In another three days, I would see the dawn's first sunray fill a stone window in the 550-year-old Temple of the Sun at Machu Picchu.

The Incas' “lost city” is one of the world's iconic destinations, with over 1.2 million visitors in 2015. But to absorb the mesmerizing historical and spiritual significance of this region, I first explored Cuzco's fusion of native traditions and colonial heritage, and then trekked with locals through the steep 15,000-foot mountains surrounding it.

## World's navel

Cuzco was built on an 11,150-foot Andean plateau. By the mid-15th century, it became the umbilical center of the Incas' continent-spanning empire.

The perfectly-fitted, massive mortar-free walls of their palaces and temples still line many of the narrow streets, though most buildings were rebuilt after the violent conflicts during the Spanish conquest a century later. The rounded boulders of the Incas' central sanctuary, Qoricancha, became the foundation of Santo Domingo, whose convent courtyard encloses the temple's tapered niches.

European and indigenous imagery mixes in Cuzco's celebrated paintings, most conspicuously in an 18th century “Last Supper” canvas in the cathedral that features a paws-up, roasted Andean rodent as the meal's entree.

I preferred seafood ceviche at Limo restaurant or local charcuterie at Museo del Pisco, paired with potent pisco sours. But I did try cuy



This May 31 photo shows a panorama of Machu Picchu, built by the Incas in the mid-15th century nearly 8,000 feet up a ridge between precipices where the Andes meet the Amazon basin in Peru.



This June 1 photo shows visitors taking selfies with llamas along a terrace in Machu Picchu, Peru.

(guinea pig) in chiriuchu, a dish including fish eggs, corn fritters, seaweed, sausage, dried meat, cheese, chicken and singeing rocoto pepper prepared for the Corpus Christi celebration, held 60 days after Easter.

That holiday and Inti Raymi, the winter solstice celebration in late June, are Cuzco's wildest mingling

of piety and partying. They fall at the start of prime hiking season (May-October).

## Above the clouds

From my glass-covered igloo, the swirls of stars framing Salkantay were breathtaking, even more so than hiking to this camp at 12,631 feet on the Salkantay trail,



This May 26 photo shows a group of Catholic faithful, dressed in traditional Quechua clothing, waiting to start carrying a statue of the Virgin Mary in the Corpus Christi procession in the main plaza of Cuzco, Peru.

which follows ancient routes and is considered the best alternative to the often sold-out Inca Trail.

For four days, we hiked past glaciers and through cloud forests to Machu Picchu. Our guides, Kenneth Leon and Irvin Llacta from Salkantay Trekking, showed our group of nine from four coun-

tries turquoise mountain lakes, tiny mud-brick villages, and centuries-old Inca channels.

They also grounded us in local life, explaining Quechua traditions like medicinal uses of plants they picked by the trail, where we also found mouthwatering avocados and granadillas (a type of passion fruit). Their team of cooks and horsemen prepared eight-course meals and afternoon teas of mate de coca, which alleviates altitude sickness.

## Toward the sun

From the village of Aguas Calientes, I looked across the river straight up vertical peaks and cheated, taking the shuttle instead of 1,500-plus steps to Machu Picchu.

In the mid-15th century, the Incas built this improbable citadel nearly 8,000 feet up on a skinny ridge between precipices where the Andes meet the Amazon basin, and abandoned it a hundred years later. It lay covered by the rain forest until the 1910s, when Yale historian Hiram Bingham brought it global renown. (Many artifacts he took were recently returned to Cuzco, at Museo Machu Picchu Casa Concha.)

For two days, I wandered the main site along steep staircases, climbed the “you-slip-you-die” path to the ruins on Huayna Picchu, the peak overlooking the citadel, and walked the Inca Trail to the Intipunku viewpoint.

The nearly 200 gray houses, temples and agricultural buildings are haunting, but the practical and cosmological engineering is mind-blowing. From every perspective, the view defies logic: Terraces clinging to sheer, 1,640-foot drop-offs hold up colossally heavy granite palaces and sanctuaries. Carved stones, foundations and windows precisely trace the sun's travels and line with sacred peaks like Salkantay.

Late on my last afternoon, a white llama grazing inches from my feet woke me from a doze on a terrace overlooking the citadel. Most of the thousands of daily tourists had gone, and workers raked highlighter-green grass in the main plaza.

Archaeologists still debate why the Incas built this citadel. As I watched the sun slant through the peaks, tinging wisps of clouds at eye level, the real and symbolic magic of Machu Picchu's placement seemed answer enough.

# Onion corn bread leaves lasting memory

By ELIZABETH KARMEL  
Associated Press

Over the summer, I traveled to Wooster, Ohio, for a barbecue summit at the headquarters of Certified Angus Beef.

It was a trip filled with learning, camaraderie — and lots of smoked beef.

My fellow barbecue pit masters and I visited a black angus ranch, talked barbecue non-stop, cut a side of beef together — or rather watched as the “meat doctor” Phil Bass cut and explained.

I was introduced to several new cuts including beef belly — also known as beef bacon — which I immediately made when I got back home. But, the standout of the trip wasn't barbecue at all. Instead, it was a Vidalia onion cornbread made by Ashley Pado, chef of the education and culinary center at Certified Angus Beef headquarters.

Pado headed up a team of chefs preparing that day's feast that included a table of smoked beef, numerous side dishes, home-baked breads, pickled vegetables and that memorable cornbread that sparkled with a pave of caramelized Vidalia onion rings set in the bottom of the cornbread. When Pado served the cornbread, she inverted it in the cast-iron pan so you could see the concentric circles of onion baked into the bottom. Even before we took a bite, the group marveled at the presentation and wondered why more people don't embellish cornbread.

The cornbread itself is light and cakey with a little tang and a little sweetness but the salty savory almost-fried onions take it over the top. Pado sauteed the onions in beef bacon since she had it in her pantry. When I made the recipe, I adapted it using pork bacon but you could use butter or any kind of bacon that you can get your hands on.

Elizabeth Karmel is a barbecue and Southern foods expert. She is the chef and pit master at online retailer CarolinaCueToGo.com and the author of three books, including “Taming the Flame.”



AP Photo/Richard Drew

## VIDALIA ONION CAST-IRON CORNBREAD

**Start to finish:** One hour

**Servings:** 8

**Equipment:** 9 or 10-inch cast-iron skillet

- 1 ½ cups all-purpose flour
- ⅔ cup granulated white sugar
- ½ cup yellow corn meal
- 1 tablespoon baking powder
- ½ teaspoon kosher salt
- ½ cup heavy cream
- ½ cup buttermilk
- 3 whole eggs, beaten
- ½ cup vegetable oil
- 3 tablespoons melted butter
- 1 large Vidalia onion, sliced thin and kept together as one piece in rounds
- 4 slices bacon, diced

Heat oven to 375 F  
Saute bacon over low heat in skillet until crisp. Meanwhile slice thin rounds of onions, making sure you keep them intact and in one piece.

Remove bacon from pan but leave the bacon grease for the onions to cook in. Carefully place the onion rounds in the bottom of the pan to cover the surface. Let onions cook until the edges begin to brown. Be careful to keep onions in place — the bottom of the skillet will have a “polka-dot” pattern. Season onions with a dusting of fresh ground black pepper. Turn off the heat and set aside until ready to bake the cornbread. If the pan cools down, warm the pan on low heat before pouring the cornbread batter in pan.

In a large bowl, whisk together flour, sugar, corn meal, baking powder and salt. Set aside.

In a separate bowl, mix together the cream, buttermilk, oil, eggs and melted butter until combined — the mixture will emulsify. Set aside.

Add wet to dry ingredients and mix until combined. Don't over mix. Batter should look slightly lumpy.

Just before baking, add the cooked bacon back to the pan and place in the areas around the onions, not on top of the onions or it will interfere with the onion pattern. Pour cornbread batter directly into hot pan. Place in the center rack of the oven and bake for 30 minutes or until a toothpick inserted in the middle comes out clean.

Cool in the pan for 20 minutes, run a blunt knife around the edges of the cast-iron skillet to make sure that it isn't sticking on the sides. Carefully turn the skillet upside down and flip cornbread out of pan to expose onion rounds — you can invert the cornbread and place it upside down back into the skillet for serving.

Serve at room temperature or warm.

*Nutrition information per serving: 419 calories; 211 calories from fat; 24 g fat (9 g saturated; 1 g trans fats); 117 mg cholesterol; 407 mg sodium; 46 g carbohydrate; 2 g fiber; 20 g sugar; 7 g protein.*

# Frozen Bulletproof Coffee that's creamy without the cream

By MELISSA D'ARABIAN  
Associated Press

I love coffee. My standard order is simple: coffee with milk, no sugar. I don't veer off into milkshake-land or over-sweetened hot-chocolate-type drinks with folds of fluffy whipped cream.

So when bulletproof coffee — usually a mug of joe blended with butter — became trendy a few years ago, it was a non-issue for me. Why mess with 30 years of simple coffee-drinking perfection?

Proponents claimed bulletproof coffee helped them lose weight (I was skeptical), and it gave them more energy (wasn't that the point of caffeine?). And then I tried it: it was downright delicious; lusciously creamy. Why didn't the PR folks lead with that?

For those of you who have not tried bulletproof coffee, it is essentially hot coffee blended up with a spoonful of coconut oil or ghee (clarified butter) until the whole mixture becomes creamy pale brown, as the oil emulsifies into the coffee. Usually, a little vanilla or cinnamon is added.

Basically, it's creamy coffee, without the cream, and a coconut flavor undertone. It appeals to the dairy-free and paleo crowd to be sure, but honestly, anyone who loves coffee should try it at least once. (Tip: be very careful when you blend up hot liquids in a blender.)

Now, imagine that your bulletproof coffee and your favorite smoothie had a child. That is my recipe today — Frozen Bulletproof Coffee — and it may become your new favorite coffee order.

I made this version with peanut butter, banana and cinnamon, but feel free to swap out ingredients and make it your own — add pumpkin pie spice and you'll be super seasonal. Even if you are addicted to the fluffy frozen dessert concoctions that are made in the name of coffee, you will love this frozen bulletproof coffee.

(Fluffy coffee drinkers note: there's no added sugar in my recipe, but feel free to add a small spoonful of honey if you must.) Bulletproof coffee is like being on an exotic vacation — I love it, but I also crave the homey comfort of my standard



Melissa d'Arabian via AP

## FROZEN BULLETPROOF COFFEE

**Start to finish:** 5 minutes  
**Servings:** 1

- ¾ cup brewed black coffee (hot)
- 1 tablespoon coconut oil
- 1 cup ice cubes
- 1 tablespoon peanut butter
- ½ banana, frozen and sliced
- 1 tablespoon plain protein powder (optional)
- pinch cinnamon
- dash vanilla
- pinch salt

Place the coffee in a blender and add the coconut oil. Cover, leaving the lid a little askew (so steam doesn't build up), and cover with a kitchen towel. Carefully blend on medium-high until coconut oil is emulsified into the coffee and it is creamy brown, about 30 seconds. Add the ice cubes and the remaining ingredients and blend until smooth, about 30 more seconds. Pour into a large glass and enjoy.

Note: It's important to make the bulletproof coffee first before adding the other ingredients so that the coconut oil emulsifies properly.

*Nutritional information per serving: 306 calories; 195 calories from fat; 22 g fat (14 g saturated; 0 g trans fats); 20 mg cholesterol; 108 mg sodium; 19 g carbohydrate; 3 g fiber; 9 g sugar; 11 g protein.*

cup of morning joe. When I feel like something special, though, this Frozen Bulletproof Coffee is my go-to.

Food Network star Melissa d'Arabian is an expert on healthy eating on a budget. She is the author of the cookbook “Supermarket Healthy.”