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Weaving in the Peruvian Highlands: Dreaming Patterns, Weaving Memories

by Nilda Callanaupa Alvarez

Handwoven fabrics comprise the living history and culture of the Peruvian highlands from Cusco to Machu Picchu and beyond. Fabric patterns with evocative names reflect the landscape and events of the highlands in vivid color, evolving over time. The weavings and the weavers who create these fabrics are celebrated in **WEAVING IN THE PERUVIAN HIGHLANDS: DREAMING PATTERNS, WEAVING MEMORIES** (Center for Traditional Textiles of Cusco, November 2007, \$19.95) by Nilda Callanaupa Alvarez, founder of the Center for Traditional Textiles of Cusco, a combination school, gallery, and museum in Cusco, Peru, and the beneficiary of all sales of the book.

Travelers visiting the Peruvian highlands (hundreds of thousands a year from North America alone) are drawn to the authentic, well-crafted work and given an opportunity to collect the weavings at every street corner and rail stop. **WEAVING IN THE PERUVIAN HIGHLANDS** is a guide to the handwoven fabrics found in the area, as well as a look into the history and culture surrounding the weaving traditions. Readers will learn to appreciate the quality of the work, and will gain a deeper understanding and appreciation for the craft and people of Peru. They will learn how pattern names, such as Meandering River or Lake with Flowers, relates to the geography and history; how the traditional natural materials and colors of the weavings enhance the value of the handiwork; and learn what the traditional clothing on the region entails and why the traditions are preserved and celebrated.

The Peruvian highland weavers who create the handwoven fabrics in time-honored traditions are showcased in **WEAVING IN THE PERUVIAN HIGHLANDS** as keepers of the culture and sustainers of the noble but difficult lifestyle in tune with the Peruvian earth. They raise llamas and alpacas for fiber, collect plants for natural dyes, spin yarn on primitive spindles, and weave acres of cloth on simple backstop looms just as their forebears had done for thousands of years. They weave clothing, rugs, bedcovers, potato sacks, hunting slings, and sacrificial fabrics for themselves and their villages and for sale to supplement their meager incomes, depending on tourism to the area.

A beautiful book celebrating the people and handiwork of Peru, **WEAVING IN THE PERUVIAN HIGHLANDS** is a must-have for those interested in Peruvian culture, tourism of South America, or the

historical aspects of weaving and fiber arts. The luscious full-color photographs will transport readers to Peru to dive into the culture, colors, and traditions of woven cloth.

**WEAVING IN THE PERUVIAN HIGHLANDS:
DREAMING PATTERNS, WEAVING MEMORIES
by Nilda Callanaupa Alvarez**

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Nilda Callanaupa Alvarez is a master Andean weaver and founder of the Center for Traditional Textiles of Cusco, which includes a weaving cooperative, a school for young girls, a museum, and a gallery that is dedicated to preserving the textiles heritage of the region. She also established weaving co-ops in nine far flung mountain villages to perpetuate traditional techniques and build economic development in those fragile societies. Nilda grew up in the high valley of Chinchero and was recognized as a child prodigy. By age 14 she was giving weaving demonstrations at the Smithsonian and the American Museum of Natural History. From her traditional beginnings in the high Andes she blazed a non-traditional path, graduating with a degree in tourism from the University of Cusco in Peru. She is an explorer-in-residence with the National Geographic Society and has been a speaker on Andean Textile heritage at Harvard University, Cornell University, the University of Vermont, Brown University, and the textile Museum in Washington, D.C., among other institutions. She lives in Cusco with her husband and two sons.

About the Center for Traditional Textiles of Cusco:

The Center for Traditional Textiles of Cusco (CTTC) is a nonprofit organization founded in 1996, when the textile traditions in the Cusco region of the Andes, based in the ancient pre-Colombian cultures of Peru, were in danger of disappearing forever. Younger generations had ceased to learn how to weave as well as the traditions behind it, leaving the fate of Peruvian textiles in the hands of aging generations.

The principal objectives of the Center are to recapture the history of, spread information about, and stimulate the production of traditional textiles, as well as provide support and assistance to the communities of weavers with which the Center works. By researching and documenting techniques, styles, and designs, the Center works to preserve weaving traditions for future generations.

Presently, the Center works with nine communities in the region of Cusco: Accha Alta, Acopia, Chahuaytire, Chinchero, Chumbivilcas, Mahuaypampa, Patabamba, Pitumarca, and Sallac; all of which preserve unique ancestral techniques in their textiles.

These communities are working to better the quality of life while reinstating millennia-old practices integral to their cultural history and identity. By promoting the sale of textiles, providing each community with its proper place to weave, and above all else, encouraging the younger generations to weave, the CTTC is accomplishing one of its most desired goals: enabling Cusquenian weavers to feel proud of their heritage, traditions, and most importantly, themselves.

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