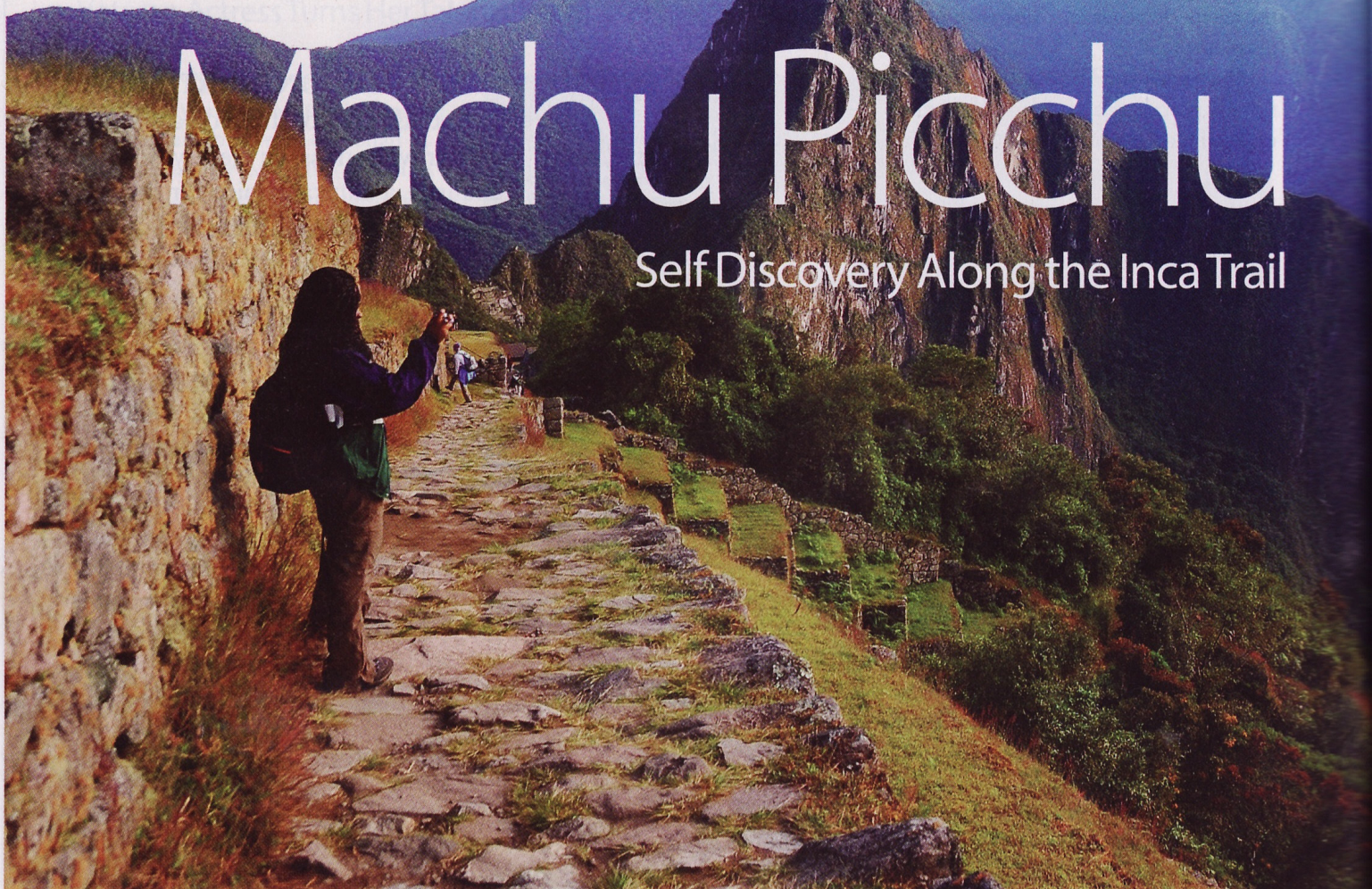


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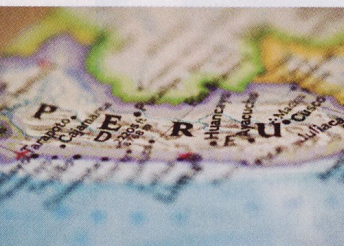
# Machu Picchu

## Self Discovery Along the Inca Trail



story & photographs by lola akinmade

**W**e lay sprawled along the rocky narrow trail, utterly exhausted. Daypacks as pillows, sunhats half covering our eyes from the sun, fatigue had completely taken over. Our legs were failing us, muscles tensed from such unfamiliar, grueling exercise. My chest kept expanding wildly, trying to suck in as much of the thin air as it could. I'd done everything I was told to do—from drinking coca tea to chewing coca leaves—to help with the high altitude.



Even time-tested remedies wane. Forging on was virtually impossible at this point; I had mentally collapsed.

“Señoritas?” the voice started low, gradually increasing in pitch as I stirred from my semi-conscious state. With wide grins, some toothless, Quechua porters stared down at us in a mixture of amusement and pity.

“Lo siento!” I managed an apology before rolling onto my side, making a narrower path for them to pass. They wanted us to keep pushing. We were carrying light daypacks, sporting the latest hiking boots and wearing the coolest hiking apparel. They were lugging an average of 60 pounds of camping gear each in nothing more than rubber sandals made from old car tires.

We struggled to our feet, ashamed that we'd been ready to give up barely halfway through the trek. Day two on the Inca Trail found us trekking 11 miles toward the highest point on the trail, Dead Woman's Pass at 13,800 feet above sea level.

With renewed vigor, we charged on.

I'd planned this renowned trek for months. No stranger to adventurous trips, my travels had already taken me from the remote dense jungles of Fiji and the Running of the Bulls in Pamplona to Jukkasjärvi, way past the Arctic Circle in Swedish Lapland. This adventure was different. In addition to demanding physical endurance, it danced a mental tango with me, which required I reach deeper into my soul for strength.