

Exhibition brings wonder of Machu Picchu to the masses

Jacqui Goddard, Miami

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A touring exhibition will feature an immersive experience of Machu Picchu and jewellery that predates the Inca civilisation
ALAMY

A wonder of engineering 2,400 metres above sea level, the 15th-century Inca citadel of Machu Picchu has for decades welcomed up to a million visitors a year to explore its terraced ruins and stunning views.

Now the mountaintop sanctuary dubbed the “mysterious city in the sky” is coming to the masses as part of an exhibition that also showcases the largest collections of gold treasures to travel the world.

Machu Picchu and the Golden Empires of Peru features ornate artefacts, including burial regalia from the tombs of kings, queens, priests and priestesses, and a virtual reality exploration of the cradle of the Inca civilisation, made possible by drone footage shot with special dispensation from the Peruvian government.

Ron Tan, executive chairman of Cityneon, the entertainment company presenting the tour, said: “Visitors can personally feel the magnificence of Machu Picchu like they are physically there.”

The collection is on loan from the Museo Larco and the Museo de Sitio Manuel Chávez Ballón - institutions in Peru that host the country’s most significant cultural riches.

Accompanying the 192 gold, silver and ceramic antiquities is a multisensory experience that allows visitors to see, hear, feel and even smell the ruins of Machu Picchu through virtual reality headsets. The experience is guided by a mythological superhero, Ai Apaec, who narrates some of the mysteries of Andean cosmology.

Video footage for the experience was obtained by drones that flew over the sanctuary while Machu Picchu was closed to the public last year due to the pandemic.

Andean societies dominated a large area of South America for over 3,000 years through the reign of the Inca Empire, whose nucleus was in what is now Peru. They believed that their world consisted of three domains; an overworld inhabited by the sun and celestial gods, an underworld where their ancestors lived, and the “here and now”, occupied by humans and non-humans.

The exhibition focuses on ancient civilisations that pre-date the Incas and tells the legend of Ai Apaec, a deity who moved between all three domains, encountering anything from sea demons to owl shamans and sacred snails, to place in context the artefacts on show and explain the rites, rituals and beliefs on which Andean society was based. The collection includes pitchers and bottles, sculptures, bodily ornaments, funeral masks, warrior gear, sacrificial weapons and ceremonial attire. The highlight is a set of gold burial attire belonging to a Chimú emperor, dating to 1300 AD.

The exhibition, which goes on a global tour next year, premiered at the Boca Raton Museum of Art in Florida. Irvin Lippman, its executive director, said: “These objects are extraordinary. We have these vessels, this talent and creativity, that speak to us thousands of years later.”

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