

ENTERTAINMENT

Fort Myers company launches blockbuster Inca exhibit. After Florida: A world tour.

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It's a blockbuster museum exhibit expected to draw hundreds of thousands of visitors to Florida: Gold and silver artifacts and other treasures from ancient South America, all worth an estimated billions of dollars.

It won't stop there, though. After the Boca Raton show wraps up in March, "[Machu Picchu and the Golden Empires of Peru](#)" hits the road for a 10-city world tour that organizers expect to be one of the biggest draws around.

And it all started right here in Southwest Florida.

"Machu Picchu" — named after the former Incan city in the mountains of Peru — is the first self-produced exhibit from new Fort Myers company [World Heritage Exhibitions \(WHE\)](#). But it won't be the last, its organizers say.

The idea is to connect people with history in a deep and entertaining way, says company chairman John Norman — a veteran of some of the biggest exhibits to ever tour, including "Titanic: Ship of Dreams" and "King Tut: Treasures of the Golden Pharaoh."

"It's about telling stories," the Fort Myers resident says. "I think that that's what captures people's imaginations, when they're able to be intrigued and they can say, 'Boy, I didn't know that!'"



One of many gold artifacts featured in the exhibit "Machu Picchu and the Golden Empires of Peru" at the Boca Raton Museum of Art. The exhibit continues through March 2022. *Special To The News-Press*



Anthony Tann (left) and John Norman of World Heritage Exhibitions pose for a photo in the ancient mountain city of Machu Picchu in Peru. *Special To The News-Press*

Company president Anthony Tann co-founded WHE with international managing director Andres Numhauser in 2020. They already have several major touring exhibits on the road, including "Pompeii: The Exhibition" and "Ramses the Great and the Gold of the Pharaohs."

"These are blockbuster exhibitions," Tann says.



The ancient Incan city of Machu Picchu rests in the mountains of Peru. It's now a popular tourist attraction. *Courtesy Of World Heritage Exhibitions*

"Ramses" and "Pompeii" were produced by other companies and purchased by WHE, but "Machu Picchu" is the first exhibit they've organized and produced themselves.

There's nothing quite like taking a collection of artifacts and turning them into a living, breathing museum exhibit, Tann says.

"When we first finish an installation and you walk through it, it's like a surreal moment," the Cape Coral resident says. "You almost always get the chills. ... It's just that moment where you walk through it and you're like, 'Wow.'"

WHE maintains its corporate headquarters, including five full-time employees, in an office off Jetport Loop near Southwest Florida International Airport. But Norman points out that the company is actually a national one with employees across the United States, including in San Antonio, Texas, and Los Angeles.

"It really doesn't matter where our offices are," Norman says. "We're always on the road."

Tann started out in the museum business about four or five years ago, working with Norman at his old job with entertainment company IMG.

"John was a great mentor," Tann says. "He taught me everything I needed to know about the business."

After Norman left IMG, he came to work with Tann at the new company. Both men say they're interested in presenting history in a new and different way.

"That's what we really created at WHE," Tann says. "And that's why John's on board with us. It's like the family's back together."

WHE declined to release attendance figures for “Machu Picchu,” but a spokesman said the exhibit’s Oct. 16 opening was “the highest attended opening for an exhibition ever at the Boca Raton Museum of Art.”

You really have to see these ancient South American artifacts in person to appreciate them, Norman says.

“You can go online and look on your computer. You can see pictures of things,” he says. “But when you can stand and be looking at — right in front of you — a piece of history that was made by somebody thousands or hundreds of years ago ... there’s something special and magical there.”



“Machu Picchu and the Golden Empires of Peru” opened this month at the Boca Raton Museum of Art. The exhibit continues through March 2022 *Special To The News-Press*

“Machu Picchu and the Golden Empires of Peru” continues through March 2022 at the Boca Raton [Museum of Art](#). Here’s more about the exhibit:

- The exhibit showcases 192 objects worth an estimated billions of dollars, Tann says. Many of the artifacts came from royal tombs, and some have never been seen outside of Peru.
- The exhibit is named after Machu Picchu, a former Incan city in the Peruvian mountains that now operates as a popular tourist site.
- The artifacts come from various ancient South American societies in the [Andes Mountains](#), including the Incan Empire — a vast civilization that stretched from modern-day Argentina to southern Colombia until the Spanish conquest in 1572.
- The immersive exhibit is spread out across the entire museum on both floors.
- Visitors will hear the sounds of roaring jaguars, screaming macaws and torrential rainfall.
- Unlike the ancient Egyptians, the Incans didn’t have a written language, Norman says. “So there’s a lot of mystery there. They basically told their stories in their artwork.”
- After Boca Raton, the show goes on a 10-city world tour. WHE hasn’t announced the cities yet. The exhibit will eventually return to tour the United States, Tann says, but that will be a few years from now.

- A virtual-reality experience lets visitors sit in haptic “motion chairs” that move and react as they take a virtual tour of Machu Picchu’s ruins. The Peruvian government allowed WHE to take thousands of photos with a drone and stitch them together into a virtual-reality world using the Unreal videogaming engine. “It’s like an environment you can walk around in,” Tann says. “It looks just as real as if you’re there.”
- The chairs are equipped with high-resolution VR headsets, haptic feedback on the backseats, scent dispensers and 360-degree rotation.
- The collection is on loan from Museo Larco in Lima, Peru; and Museo de Sitio Manuel Chávez Ballón in Aguas Calientes, Peru.
- The show is a co-production with Singapore company Cityneon.
- Tickets are \$30 (\$20 for ages 3-12) and can be purchased at bocamuseum.org/golden. The virtual reality experience costs an additional \$18.



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