Day 13 Thur

A positive lie in for the JoLters today with a 7am wake up call, not surprisingly most of the group greeted the news with a huge cheer. The news that it was a free couple of hours with an opportunity to visit some shops in Cusco brought even more shouts of joy. With the leaders placing themselves in a central cafe boundaries were set, groups of three organised and everyone went on their way to buy some gifts and souvenirs to remind themselves of Cusco and Peru.

Everyone enjoyed seeing the colourful textiles and clothing in the markets and the exchange rate worked in the JoLters favour as they managed to relieve the local shopkeepers of their wares. It was a very excitable group that met back a couple of hours later, everyone carrying gifts, comparing haggling tactics and some sporting some very Peruvian trousers.

A quick trip back to the hotel to collect bags and we were on on our way to the Sayllafalla community. The coach journey to this remote community high in mountains behind the city of Lamay was lengthy, not only because of the miles travelled but because of the single track dirt road that formed most of the last leg of the trip. The scenery was spectacular, matched by the shear drops from the roadside as we switched back and forth to ascend the mountains. We all decided that the drivers deserved a medal for their expertise on the roads.

The JoLters were unsure what to expect at the remote village but were soon reassured as the young children, many dressed in traditional costume greeted us with giggles and shy smiles, our hearts were soon captured as they watched us unload and slowly became more confident as the moments went on.

The villagers had already set tents up for us in the school playground, a dusty area with a spectacular outlook over the mountains and deeply incised valleys. The tents were comfortable and we were touched by the way the whole community was obviously trying to make us feel incredibly welcome. After a hot meal we had the privilege to be invited as guests at an 'Independance Day' festival, we had no idea of what was involved but all the JoLters were keen to go.

As nighttime fell we met the community on the edge of the playground where we had camped. Everyone was dressed in traditional costumes and all the children had made lanterns in various shapes and sizes including a VW beetle, a plane and several animals. We followed the lantern lit procession around the village with Independance songs and chanting as we walked.

Finally we congregated back at the campsite for singing and dancing which went on for several hours. The atmosphere was superb, we were enthralled by the young children singing and eventually were persuaded to add our own contributions. They really seemed to like our rendition of 'Animal farm', 'If you are happy and you know it' and by the time we sang 'Hokey Kokey' the whole village joined in. We have to add that no one spoke English and our guide Maria was frantically translating. Everyone was so excited it was hard for the JoLters to get into their tents to sleep.