

Dear Leapers,

Welcome to the second edition of the Leap Local newsletter, full of exciting news and tales about unique travel experiences and the local guides and communities who make them possible. You can read about the villagers in the mountains of Peru who are opening up their homes to travellers, tornado chasing and rattlesnake culinary treats in Kansas, the dazzling but fragile Chicon glacier in Peru's Sacred Valley and how local taxi drivers are using Leap Local to promote themselves and the Inca salt mines to foreign visitors. And of course, you can find out about some of our recently added locals too.

But before we get to all that, we wanted to tell you about something which has been happening here in the UK. Much to our delight, in July we discovered that Leap Local was one of 500 tourism organisations nominated for the Virgin Holidays Responsible Tourism Awards 2008. These awards are the largest of their kind in the world and attract 1000s of nominations, so we were ecstatic to be one of 17 organisations recognised and long listed in the Best for Poverty Reduction Category. If we were to win one of the major advantages would be a huge marketing push for Leap. This would mean a higher volume of web traffic, more recommendations, and more locals and tourists benefiting from the site. So we'd like to say a big thank you to everyone that nominated us, and to all those that wrote such wonderful references. Watch this space and keep your fingers crossed!

Other than that it has been business as usual, with an ever expanding network of guides and service-providers and more and more travellers recommending new locals through the website. Although much of our activity is still focused in South America, our reach is slowly expanding to other parts of the world. Check out [leaplocal.org](http://leaplocal.org) for more information.

And as always, happy travelling!

*From Lou*

Co-founder of Leap Local



## New accommodation with local families in Patakancha

**Leap has been active in supporting and promoting a new initiative called 'homestays', set up by Peruvian locals in Patakancha.**

*With the help of several organisations including Leap, the locals have been able to build extra bedrooms and bathrooms on to their homes and are now offering accommodation to tourists, giving them and their families an extra income. Liles and Lou (Leap co-founders) were invited to the opening ceremony..*

As we ascended to an altitude of 4200m the weather changed and I was quickly putting on all available clothes. We arrived in Patakancha early to be given a tour of the new homestays by the owners, who were clearly very excited about the project. The women and men were all proudly dressed in traditional attire as meticulous preparations for the celebrations began. They went about their business effortlessly, while Lou and I were constantly reminded of the altitude as we struggled to find our breath.

Although there are a few guided tours to Patakancha the local community have traditionally had few opportunities to engage with tourists. The launch of 'homestays' has had a huge impact, since now for the first time a tourist can visit in relative luxury, whilst benefiting from extraordinary hospitality and an insight into these Andean communities. And for the community, the income from the homestays will be invaluable. Hence the excitement and the ceremony!

Despite Peruvians reputation for poor time keeping, suddenly the surrounding fields were awash with colourfully dressed people arriving for the celebrations. Speeches were made by locals, and Lou was honoured to be asked to say a word.

Cont. pg 2...



*The celebrations begin with speeches*

Cont. from pg 1...

The homestays were opened by breaking a clay pot with 'chicha' to bring good luck. But of course no Peruvian ceremony is complete without roasted guinea pig and 'moraya', freeze-dried potatoes.

Having rented our bikes for the trip back to Ollantaytambo, Lou and I ended the day with a breathtaking descent. Before long I was once again back in light weather gear and enjoying the heat of the sun (it is amazing how quickly the weather changes in the mountains). The views were utterly stunning as we freewheeled the 15 km back to Ollantaytambo - small pastures nestled amongst towering hills, a rich green mix of cultivated and uncultivated land on a back drop of rocky cliffs guiding a river which connects to the Amazon.

Good luck to Lorenzo, Juan and Marcelino Yupanki and their homestays.

You can hire bikes in Ollantaytambo and use one of the taxi drivers recommended on Leap Local to get you there.

For more information...

[www.leaplocal.org](http://www.leaplocal.org) - How to go Local - How to get to Patakancha and Huilloc

[www.leaplocal.org](http://www.leaplocal.org) - Use search and enter 'Patakancha' to find homestays



One of the homestays.



Roast guinea pig



A ceremony for good luck



View on the cycle back

## Meet some of our recently added locals...

Be inspired and get active, remember to recommend any good local guides you use when you go travelling. That way other travellers can find them too!



**Name:** Reynaldo John Cervantes Quispe  
**Location:** Arequipa  
**Country:** Peru  
**Speaks:** English, Spanish, Portugese  
**Services:** Tours in Peru & South America (Ecuador, Brazil, Bolivia)  
**Recommended by:** Charlotte Richardson and Louise Norton



**Name:** Walter Wacho Soplin  
**Location:** Iquitos  
**Country:** Peru  
**Speaks:** English  
**Services:** Tours of Peruvian rainforest and Amazon basin, jungle lodge, custom expeditions, days trip, overnights  
**Recommended by:** Louise Norton



[awaiting photo]

**Name:** Juan Bautista Chevara Baca  
**Location:** Puerto Viejo-Manzanillo  
**Country:** Peru  
**Speaks:** Spanish  
**Services:** Guided tours of local ruins and the amazing Moray site; Juan has his own taxi and has worked on the site so has good knowledge  
**Recommended by:** Tim Dallman



**Name:** Ron Gravelle  
**Location:** Ontario  
**Country:** Canada  
**Speaks:** English, Ron has some knowlege of French  
**Services:** Tours, accommodation, food, other  
**Recommended by:** Kirsten Koza

For something a bit different!



# But is it... Is it possible to go local in your own backyard?

By Kirsten Koza

A tourist recently said to me that more people would visit Canada, if they knew what there was to do. I blustered but couldn't name one dog sled musher. So I searched for something insanely unique that might qualify as "going local". I found something of continental proportions, right in my backyard.

Bolivia's Death Road, the Autobahn and the Dakar Rally are famous for being the most adrenaline-loaded driving trips. However, there is another pursuit that adds flying debris, pummeling hail stones and 300-kilometre winds. The tornado chase is not for the Cowardly Lion.

"You have one job on this trip and it is to dent my car with hail!" roars Ron Gravelle, as we depart the Toronto area, on a 14-day storm chase. His wife will make fun of him if the car is returned unscarred. Ron's competitors dress like Indiana Jones or drive hummers. Ron hitches his pants too high and drives a fuel efficient vehicle. He also offers his clients hands-on opportunities. This is not typical but neither is this chaser.

Ron Gravelle was born a triplet but didn't look like his brothers. He grew up - the son of a travelling tattoo artist known as El Toro. A childhood terror of storms led Ron to become a certified chaser and Environment Canada predictor.

I'd signed on to do intercept driving and to learn to navigate. Ron's gear is geek-spectacular. 'The Baron Threat Net' shows wind shears, hail-size, fronts and where the car is in relation to the action. 'The Baron' warns us everyday, that we are approaching a severe storm. Pulse rates accelerate.

Ron navigates us to Louisiana, then Tornado Alley, off-road swerving past cacti in New Mexico, and down a tractor path to a tornado in Nebraska - with Ron bellowing at me, "Drive towards it as fast as you can!" My instinct suggested the opposite.

Equally exciting as the storms, are the unusual culinary experiences across rural USA. The rattlesnake on the menu at the Big Texan isn't a joke. The huge Diamondbacks are kept in plastic buckets in the kitchen. I found the mushrooms and bull testicles hard to distinguish between on my plate, but knew which was which as soon as I had one in my mouth...

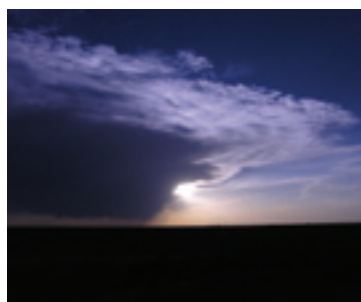
Storm Chasing takes you across a part of America that is as far from "90210" or "Sex in the City" as you can get. Motel guests in Valentine, Nebraska are asked not to clean their guns with motel towels or gut their kill in the rooms. This is contrasted with breathtaking landscape, highlighted by supercell storms powerfully plowing across fields.

Ron has seen 71 tornadoes, and 2 were with me. I failed to dent his car, but it does make a peculiar noise now.

Ron Gravelle's tours are varying lengths of duration: [www.stormchasing.ca](http://www.stormchasing.ca)

Photos from this 19,900 km tornado chase can be seen on Kirsten's website: [www.kirstenkoza.com](http://www.kirstenkoza.com)

Kirsten Koza is a travel writer and author living in Canada. See [leaplocal.org](http://leaplocal.org) for locals she has recommended, and Ron's review!



A Kansas storm powerfully plows across the fields.  
Photo: Kirsten Koza



Tornado Chasing is not for the Cowardly Lion. Kansas.  
Photo: Ron Gravelle.



Lightning from 2008 storm chase Photo: Ron Gravelle.

## Taxi drivers, cascading salt ponds and Inca terraces in the Sacred Valley...

If you are a traveller in Peru wanting to avoid the crowds at the Inca ruins, Leap Local suggests a tour of Maras in the Sacred Valley. Visitors can appreciate panoramic views of the snow-peaked Andes and fascinating Inca constructions with very few tourists to get in the way of that perfect photo.

Leap promotes fifteen recommended taxi drivers who will chauffeur and guide you through this stunning area for just 50 soles. One of the drivers, Hernan Percca, told us how Leap has helped him and his fellow drivers.



Taxistas in Leap T-shirts

"Until now we didn't have any publicity through a travel agency or any other means. Having a presence on the internet via Leap means that travellers get to hear about our services and fares, something that otherwise wouldn't be possible."

Maras is a sleepy picturesque town with colonial carved-stone doorways, 8km from Moray, which consists of concentric circular terraces, an Inca agricultural centre possibly used for developing new crops. The temperature varies between terraces, which would have facilitated the selection of crop strains for cultivation in different areas of the Inca empire with its many ecosystems. Salineras is a cascade of thousands of salt-ponds used to produce salt from thermal springs since pre-Inca times. All the drivers and their ancestors have worked in the salt-pans and have first hand knowledge of how the salt is produced.

Visit just one site or walk down from Salineras to the Sacred Valley. This is also a great area for mountain biking. If the service is good don't be afraid to tip and add a recommendation on the Leap site.

# Haku Trek offers Local Guides to a glacier in Peru's Sacred Valley

By Lauren Anne Back

Leap Local works with other organizations in the countries where it promotes local guides and services. One of these is Haku Trek, a group of local guides in the Chicon glacier above the Sacred Valley town of Urubamba.

If you're a traveller in Peru, on your way to Machu Picchu or touring Cuzco, it's likely that you will tread ground in the Sacred Valley. As wondrous as the ruins are, however, there's more to the region than just whispers of past civilizations. Just beyond the one-street community of San Isidro de Chicón is Haku Trek, a hiker's dream. The nature is extremely diverse and the people involved are passionate about preserving it, and the culture is still very much alive.

I spoke with Haku Trek's president, 20-year old Mirian Belisa Valencia Sallo, as she washed heaps of family clothing in a small stream of running water. In the distance the source of the icy water hovered - on a sunny day early in southeast Peru's dry season, the Chicón Glacier was a dazzling white spectacle above the green slopes of the valley below. The landscape was breathtaking, and it's painful to imagine that in our lifetime it will undergo irreversible change.

As we spoke, I was unable to keep my hands in the frigid water for a full minute, but Sallo's strong hands, hands that also carry two-year-old twins, never stopped scrubbing and wringing. Before they reach her yard, the unspoiled waters also sustain the life of over one thousand native plant species and an incredible array of wildlife.

Sadly, the region faces crises. Studies done at Ohio State University predict that by 2015 the majority of Peru's glaciers will have melted. Another obstacle is the serious destruction taking place in Chicón's valleys. Over the years, natural resources have been consumed at an irreplaceable rate for agricultural, firewood and domestic animal purposes.

With this environmental mission in mind, the philosophy of Haku Trek is to double as a means of economic benefit for the Chicón community. Through the aid of ProPeru (non-governmental) this aspiration is coming alive. Although Haku Trek is a United States operation, it is equally supported by young Chicón residents interested learning about tourism and the well-being of their environment.

Understandably, without the help of an outside source, the concepts of ecotourism and conservation do not land at the top of priorities in a low-income farming community. ProPeru's project coordinator Javier Saldivar says that the goal is to get Chicón residents to think outside of traditional means of earning income.

"If there is a way that the community can earn, saving natural resources will interest them," he explains. Haku Trek is a two-way learning experience - tourists learn about the region and culture and



*View of Chicón from Ramal de Maras*

their positive reactions teach the guides about their home. "Through the enthusiasm of hikers, the people from Chicón realize how special and valuable their home is," he says. Sallo also understands Saldivar's theory that the success of tourism in Chicón means promise of stability for her family. "The Haku Trek is a huge opportunity. With the money that we earn we are able to support our families economically."

## A Hidden Treasure in the Andes

Both Saldivar and Haku Trek guide Rosemary Quispe claim that the beauty of Chicón is beyond compare. "Visitors say 'I've never seen a place like this, there is no other place like this,'" says 17-year-old Quispe, on her way home from school. There are many different types of wildlife, and if you're lucky, you might see a condor. She and Sallo, her sister, also agree that it is special to share what it's like to live in a region that was once inhabited by the Incans. They want to teach the 'Apu' folklore, or spirits of the mountains, and they want to share their traditional songs in Quechua, their first language.

## The Experience

Haku Trek offers several options for hikers. The Queunyoq Valley tour is a one-day trip with lunch at the EcoLodge, and there is the two-day trek to the Chicón Glacier with meals and either camping or an EcoLodge stay provided.

For those that crave both hiking and cultural experience, Chicón's pristine beauty and rich traditions are not to be missed. And all the while you'll be in the presence of a breathtaking glacier that is slowly slipping away.

On a final note, 'haku' is Quechua for 'let's go!', so if you take part in the journey, chances are it will be the first thing you hear - a jumpstart to this unparalleled experience.

For more information, find Haku Trek on the Leap Local website or visit [www.hakutrek.com](http://www.hakutrek.com)



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We are always interested in your views on Leap, our newsletter and our website so welcome all your ideas and feedback. If you want to get in touch please go to the 'contact us' section of our website. And for the more experienced travellers amongst you, we are always looking for people to help expand Leap Local to other developing countries. If you come across a local guide or service why not recommend them to another traveller through our website? And if the travel writer in you is waiting to get out, feel free to submit some 'How to go Local' guides.

**Get involved - remember, your holiday is their livelihood!**



[www.leaplocal.org](http://www.leaplocal.org)