

**HUANCAVELICA MEDICAL MISSION,** Weeks 2 and 3 in August 2015 (8-22nd)

**Organized by Peruvian American Medical Society**

MISSION FACTS FOR VOLUNTEERS

Huancavelica is a south central Andean state (department) in Peru. It has a total population around 500 thousand, mostly inka descendants, who bear the poorest condition of all Peruvian people. The 475 years since the arrival of "Conquistadores" have rendered destruction in social progress, health, education and other parameters of well-being. Such despair led to the population strong support for the Shining Path terrorist movement that for over 20 years reigned uncontrolled in this mountainous area until the early 90's. Thousands of victims (dead or displaced) of the subsequent war; show only bigger casualties in the neighboring state of Ayacucho. At least 70,000 natives died.

The Health Services are not the best, but keep improving, with government efforts and our help. Their main and only referral center is a small hospital of 120 beds located in the city of the same name, which is the capital of the State; with a total staff of some 40 physicians. These professionals used to find so hard to live in the city or bring their families here, due to the lack of services which even today are only basic, that they only contract to work here for 2 weeks at a time; thus taking turns, alternating patient and hospital services. Otherwise, the Ministry of Health would not be able to cover most of the offered care. But although this arrangement allows the Hospital to function, it is obviously less than ideal. However our contributions have changed that status to a much better one: today there are 8 specialties in that Center.

For you as volunteer, for 2 weeks, we have arranged a good and safe lodging (\*\*\*) clean and efficient, with reasonable services at all levels. We will work mostly in the small **LIRCAY** Hospital, in the province of Angaraes, that cover the villagers and their communities: 65,000 people live in this area. We will have the support of the local system as authorized by the Ministry of Health and by the local authorities. The mission has send ahead of us medicines and medical supplies with the assistance of an important local partner: Cia de Minas "Buenaventura" who will also provide the land transportation and lodging..

You need to arrive in Lima on Friday night at latest. For Americans, no visas are required. A valid passport, of course, is needed ahead of departure. You need to be vaccinated against hepatitis A-B and that should be done at least 3 months ahead of travel. For motion sickness and altitude sickness, you may bring some **Scopolamine** patches, and Diamox tablets to take before boarding the bus ride, to fight the altitude sickness that may strike anybody. Most flights arrive at night to Lima. A coordinator will be in wait and gather all comers. For some volunteers that elect to do so, they will sleep over in Lima, to fly to Ayacucho next day, where they will also spend the night and a vehicle will pick them from Hotel Santa Rosa to final destination in Lircay four hours away. For all others, a chartered bus will pick all the volunteers from the Buenaventura headquarters, on Saturday at 6am. to drive us for some 10 hours all the way up to 8000 feet above sea level into Lircay city. It will be a safe, chartered, comfortable bus, so you may sleep several hours traveling through some of the most beautiful mountain landscapes, with lakes and snowy mountains. There is no airport up there. No flights to Lircay. (Bus toilettes will allow you to empty only your bladders, so use the airport-hotel toilettes ahead of time if needed). Just in case, carry a roll of toilette paper in your backpack and gel disinfecting bottle for your hands. Please consult the CDC webpage for further preventive measures.

**People with Chronic Respiratory or Cardiac Insufficiency of any kind should refrain of volunteering.**

All volunteers are recommended to increase their iron intake for at least two months ahead of travel, especially females, to allow Hemoglobin buildup and improve tolerance to the lower Oxygen pressure of high altitudes.

As soon as arriving to the destination, it is strongly recommended to lay in bed for at least a couple of hours to prevent "Soroche", that is High Altitude Sickness, who even in young and athletic individuals can take a toll, since the heart and lungs need a little time to adapt to the circumstances. If you follow this recommendation, you will do fine. Otherwise you may end up in the Hospital yourself. Please **Do not rush, Do Not push your body.**

The Saturday evening is thus devoted to rest and altitude adaptation. Sunday we will get acquainted with the small city and Hospital services. Patients will have been partially selected in advance so will hit the land running and

offering services on Monday to Friday. Exceptionally we may see a few emergencies, on Saturday. The weekend, (for those who stay for the two weeks) will allow some local touring and entertaining. For those departing, after the first week, Friday evening it is farewell day. For those incoming only for the second week, the routine is the same as depicted above, except we do not do major surgeries the last and previous to last day of the mission. We do not want to leave complications behind.

Please, allow me to remind you that we will not find U.S.A. standards here. So if you feel you may not easily adapt to circumstances you are not used to, *do not come!* We can't accept derogatory attitudes towards locals, nor undeserved criticism due to their poor conditions. We come to help and that includes offering any solution we can create, modify or find: For today, and tomorrow, and later. **The rule is "no bitching" please.** Students must participate for the two weeks and must always work under supervision. Temporary licenses for professionals are required and obtained in Peru. We need all doctors and nurses and professionals to please furnish us copy of their licenses, diplomas and a summary of their CV when signing-in. A copy of your flight schedule and your passport is also requested by the Government.

August is one of the best seasons to enjoy, weather wise. Days are warm under the bright sun, little rain if any at all, but evenings, nights and early mornings are cold. (Around 35-40 degrees). Bring winter type of clothing, especially warm underwear and pajamas. Rooms have electric heaters at the lodging, but still feels cold. There are no heaters at the Hospital or Health Centers. Gloves are a must and warm socks too. Do not bring any "dressy" stuff for the Mission. No shorts at all. Dark glasses are useful and skin protectors (UV filters) too. There is a lot of nice locally made woolly stuff a very reasonable price. Wool Long-Johns go for about 4 dollars as an example. Food poisoning is rare. We have contracted chefs to prepare our meals. Water is preferably drank from water bottles, non-gasified (you get really bloated with sodas when high above sea level). Just in case bring a few doses of Cipro, plus some Lomotil for personal use.

**Money Matters:** Currently one dollar translates into 3.2 soles. Change is stable and can be done better in Lima or with the few banks in this city. Only perfect dollar bills are accepted, not crumpled or heavily worn. This may be irritating, but it is the way it is for banks, vendors and everybody. ATM machines exist. Visa-MC cards are accepted for some well-established merchants, not everybody though. Other brands of cards are quite useless, as non-cash checks also.

**Communications:** locally acquired phone cards allow inexpensive phone calls to USA. Internet cafes are available usually at dirty cheap rates. There is internet but not dependable.

**Travel:** we recommend our agent Festival Tour Operator who has worked with us for several years and allows coordination of the arrivals as best as possible. Our Preferred airline is TACA-AVIANCA an excellent fleet of airplanes, linked to many main hubs in USA through their partners. We get no commissions from this airline or the travel agency: [janet@toursfestival.com](mailto:janet@toursfestival.com). Phone: 714 221 6382.

Next best is LAN airline, non-stop 9 hours flight.

Make copies of your documents and leave one safely reachable, in case you lose your passport. It will help you to get a copy promptly. There is almost no criminality in Huancavelica, but you never should be careless when you travel in foreign lands.

We will have a closing dinner together and return to Lima by bus, on last Friday evening, arriving in early a.m.

**Thank you** very much for your generous attitude: If you need further data, please do not hesitate to contact with us: Peruvian American Medical Society, c/o Dr Ralph Kuon; cell phone 323 316 6681, email: [cardiodrrgk@yahoo.com](mailto:cardiodrrgk@yahoo.com); our webpages are: [www.pamsweb.org](http://www.pamsweb.org) and our mission page at: [huancavelicapams.weebly.com](http://huancavelicapams.weebly.com). You may find us in Facebook as well.