

THE TITICACA ISLANDS: A FLOATING RESERVE WHERE TIME STOOD STILL



Lake Titicaca is a Peruvian much acknowledged treasure. Its floating islands and their indigenous inhabitants feature an ancient heritage site that is rarely to be seen - and as their attitude toward tourists softens, the islands become widely accessible to the public.

Lake Titicaca is one of the most important tourist assets of **Peru**. It is a precious natural wonder, sitting some 3.812 m above sea level. It holds an incredible volume of water - its average depth being 107 m. Just on its own, Titicaca is a spectacular place; nevertheless, its **floating islands** add an extra twist which turns the lake into a unique heritage site.

Dozens of the floating islands on the lake are home to the Uros tribe. The Uros culture pre-dates the Incas and it is no understatement to call their home a real waterworld. The Uros have for centuries build the islands out of the totora reeds and learned to cope with the difficult circumstances of life on water.

As many may guess, the Uros are quite struggling with the nuances of modern life of their environment. The waters are being continuously overfished by commercial fishermen, there are environmental and health issues threatening their culture. Also, the **tourist flow** presents a certain amount of danger, however, when controlled the Uros find it rather beneficial.

Some chiefs have decided to welcome the tourists, let them observe their traditional dances or even join in, wearing the traditional clothes provided by the tribe. The tourists may here also spend the night. To reciprocate the experience of life among the Uros, the visitors are expected to 'give something back' and are encouraged to bring food staples or practical gifts for local schools.

Initially, fifty islands were floating on the lake. The number is now being limited to thirty islands, to better cater the tourists. Some 2.000 Uros live here. The entire area is part of the Titicaca National Park Reserve, created in 1978. There are numerous rare species of birds and fish to be found here, as well as 18 native amphibian species. The tourists are now a great source of income for the Uros. Hopefully, their impact on this ancient tribe will not be too massive - after all, it is one of its kind.

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