**Machu Picchu**

Machu Picchu was a city of the Inca Empire. It is sometimes called the "lost city" because the Spanish never discovered the city when they conquered the Inca in the 1500s.  
  
Today the city is a UNESCO World Heritage Site and was voted one of the New Seven Wonders of the World.

**Where is Machu Picchu?**  
One of the most fascinating things about Machu Picchu is its location. It sits 8,000 feet above sea level atop a mountain in the Andes Mountain range in southern Peru. Three sides of the city are surrounded by cliffs that drop over 1,400 feet to the Urubamba River. At the fourth side of the city is a high mountain.

**When was Machu Picchu built?**  
Archaeologists believe that the city was first built at the peak of the Inca Empire around the year 1450. Construction likely continued on the site until the empire was conquered by the Spanish in the mid-1500s.

**Why was it built?**  
Machu Picchu was built as the royal estate for the ninth Inca King, Pachacuti. Archeologists aren't sure why he built it, however. There are a number of theories as to why he had it built. One theory is that it was a vacation retreat for the king. It is in a warmer spot than the capital city of Cuzco. It also is in a beautiful location and would have been a nice getaway for the king. Another theory is that it was built as a sacred religious site. Perhaps it was a combination of both theories.

**How was Machu Picchu built?**  
Most of the buildings are built with stones that are fitted together tightly without the use of mortar. This style of construction helped the buildings to stay intact during earthquakes. The Inca didn't use the wheel or have heavy beasts of burden, so most of the hard work was done by people. It would have taken hundreds of laborers using grass ropes and levers to move the large stones around the site.

**Who lived here?**  
Machu Picchu was not a large city. Probably only around 1,000 people lived there. It was likely a city for the Inca nobility and priests as well as their servants.  
  
**When was Machu Picchu rediscovered?**  
The city was rediscovered in July 1911 by explorer Hiram Bingham. He was led there by a local boy named Pablito Alvarez. Hiram wrote a book about the city called *The Lost City of the Incas*.

**About the City**  
The city of Machu Picchu was divided into three sections:

* Sacred District - The Sacred District was home to many of the important temples including the Temple of the Sun and the Intihuatana.
* Popular District - This was where the commoners lived who served the nobles and priests. It has small houses and places for storing supplies.
* District of Priests and Nobility - This area had nicer homes where the priests and the nobility lived.

**Interesting Facts about the Inca city of Machu Picchu**

* It is the most visited tourist destination in Peru.
* Machu Picchu means "Old Peak" or "Old Mountain" in the Quechua language of the Inca.
* There are around 140 buildings in the city as well as over 100 flights of stone steps.
* The Inca built a stone road from Cuzco to Machu Picchu. Many people still hike this trail today as part of their trip to see Machu Picchu.