



PERU HIGHLIGHTS

In Peru you can have your fill of adventure in an amazing variety of geographical and cultural settings.

Below, and in no special order, we outline some of the top places to go and things to do in Peru.

Lima

Lima, Peru's capital, is by far its biggest city and most likely to be your first stopover as all international flights land here.

It was founded in 1535 and, as the seat of the Viceroy of Spanish South America, enjoyed a monopoly on trade with Spain. Today's Lima offers a mixed bag, the chic districts of Miraflores and San Isidro and bohemian and fun Barranco are contrasting with the shanty areas which occupy the city's outlying desert hills.

The pleasant colonial centre, set around the old Plaza de Armas, boasts many fine churches and mansions.

Lima has some excellent archaeological museums, a first rate seafood cuisine and, in the summer months of December to March, good nearby beaches.

The Inca Trail

The Inca Trail to Machu Picchu is one of the world's great four day treks. It traverses an amazing variety of natural environments, taking in many spectacular archaeological sites.

The Lares Valley, the Huchuy Qosqo and the Salkantay offer alternative routes to Machu Picchu should the much sought-after Inca Trail permits have sold out.

Machu Picchu

Machu Picchu, the Lost City of the Incas, perches dramatically on a ridge-top 400 metres above the Urubamba gorge. The extensive site, where temples and palaces predominate, is set amid an awesome landscape of forested mountains.

When it was rediscovered early last century and cleared of forest, it was found to be very well preserved. It has since presented archaeologists with many unanswered questions regarding the role it played in Inca times.



Welcome to Peru

Trekking in the Cordillera Blanca & Cordillera Huayhuash

The Cordillera Blanca in Peru's central-northern Andes offers awesome scenery, and some of the best trekking and climbing in the Andes. The Blanca boasts dozens of peaks over 6,000 metres, including Huascarán (6,768m), and features the world's largest concentration of tropical glaciers.

The nearby Huayhuash range contains a dazzling array of snow peaks including seven summits above 6,000 metres.

Its highest, Yerupaja (6,634m), is Peru's second highest. The great Huayhuash Circuit trek circles the whole range, offering a succession of stunning panoramas.



Machu Picchu



More top trekking options

Whether surrounded by breathtaking snow peaks or hiking through upland tropical forest, the Cusco region offers some of the most varied trekking anywhere.

The stunning Vilcabamba range to the north of Cusco is criss-crossed by Inca paths linking together enigmatic ruins and offering great trekking options.

Machu Picchu is the best-known of Peru's remote Inca citadels, but there are also trekking routes to the impressive Choquequirao ruins, which are nicknamed the "new" Machu Picchu.



Fascinating and colourful cultures

To the south the Vilcanota range is dominated by towering snow peaks and boasts the largest tropical glacier on earth. Its centre-piece is Ausangate (6,384m), and the area supports traditional llama-herding communities. Trekking here takes you away from the crowds and our fantastic lodge-based option offers comfort for those who prefer a bed to a thermarest.

Archaeological wonders

A whole host of archaeological sites dot the Peruvian landscape. The mysterious lost cities of the pre-Inca Chachapoya civilization nestle in the remote cloud forests of Peru's extreme north, while the north coast boasts dozens of Mochica pyramids, among them the dazzling burial site of the Lord of Sipan.

The remote temple of Chavin de Huantar in the north-central Andes, was a pan-Andean cult centre 3,000 years ago and the Nazca city of Cahuachi, in the southern deserts, was the capital of the civilization responsible for the enigmatic Nazca Lines 1,500 years ago.

The hundreds of Inca sites found in the southern Andes are among Peru's finest archaeological legacies. There are many well-preserved sites in and around the Sacred Valley near Cusco, including Pisac and Ollantaytambo, while the Titicaca area boasts many fine ancient structures, including the burial towers of Sillustani.

Cusco & the Sacred Valley

Cusco is the archaeological and cultural capital of South America. The one-time centre of the vast Inca Empire is a bustling highland city with bags of character. Its whitewashed streets and plazas feature a fascinating blend of Inca and Spanish colonial stonework. At night, Cusco offers the continent's best Andean folk music scene.

Outside the city, there are many outstanding examples of sacred Inca architecture, including the monumental temple-fortress of Sacsayhuaman, which is made up of massive, precisely interlocking stones.

Some 30 kilometres from Cusco lies the Sacred Valley of the Incas, a must-see for its spectacular setting, archaeological sites and markets. Pisac hosts a very good craft market and boasts a nearby mountain-top citadel. The Inca town of Ollantaytambo and Indian market of Chincheros are unique and fascinating.



Lake Titicaca

Lake Titicaca, Taquile and Amantani Islands

Lake Titicaca (3,838m) is like a vast ocean set in the middle of the Andes. It is the largest lake in South America and, at 180 kilometers long, is also the world's highest navigable lake. Its islands and shores support many Indian communities, including that of the unique and beautiful Taquile Island.

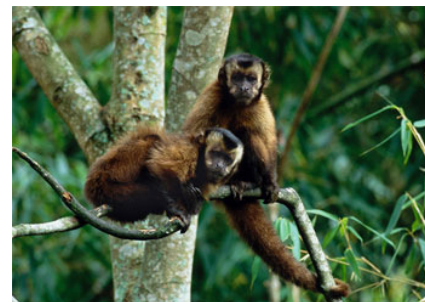
Three hours by boat from Puno, Taquile - only 4km x 1km - supports a population of 2,000. What makes this island so interesting are its unique customs, far removed from our own and distinct from the rest of Peru. The island is known for the



sophistication of its weaving, practised from a young age by both men and women.

Alternatively, you can stay with the villagers of Amantani Island on Lake Titicaca for a unique insight into the life of these islanders who subsist from traditional Andean agriculture, growing potatoes and corn, and from fishing and weaving.

Their island community offers visitors a friendly welcome and warm hospitality and by staying the night you will have time to explore the island and climb one of the island's two peaks to marvel at the sunset over the world's highest navigable lake.



Monkeys in Manu National Park

The Amazon

Peru boasts in its Amazonian region a vast swathe of world-class tropical wilderness with several rainforest and cloudforest reserves which are home to an immense diversity of wildlife.

Accessible by road, air and river from Lima, Iquitos or Cusco, the Amazon jungle is just a hop away from the highlands and coast. Yet it offers a unique, exhilarating and unforgettable experience, whether you choose to base yourself at a comfortable lodge or enjoy a more demanding camping trip.

In Peru's southeast lies one of the world's most extensive tracts of tropical reserve. An extraordinary region comprising the Tambopata National Reserve and the Bahuaja Sonene and Manu National Parks, it boasts the greatest animal and plant diversity anywhere in the world, including 1,300 bird species, 200 mammal species and 15,000 species of flowering plants.

In the north lies access to the Amazon from Iquitos, where the mighty Amazon is already several kilometers wide in places.

The Nazca Lines, Paracas and the Ballestas Islands

The Paracas coastal reserve and Ballestas islands lie just a few hours south of Lima by road and are home to a quintessential range of coastal fauna. A rugged desert peninsula, Paracas boasts huge resident communities of flamingos and skimmers, as well as archaeological vestiges of the Paracas culture.

The Ballestas islands, reached by speedboat, are home to colonies of sealions, seabirds and Humboldt penguins. Nazca, a small town set in the parched desert of central-southern Peru, is known for the intriguing Nazca culture, and in particular for the mysterious Nazca Lines; huge geometric designs, trapezoids and straight lines many kilometres long, which were etched into the desert by the ancient Nazca people.

Theories regarding their purpose range from an astrological calendar to water fertility symbols and sacred paths to extraterrestrial landing sites.

Arequipa and the Colca Canyon



El Misti Volcano

Arequipa (2,325m) is an attractive city full of colonial character and boasting a year-round spring climate. Situated in the volcanic southern highlands of Peru, it commands impressive views of three nearby volcanoes, including El Misti (5,821m) and Chachani (6,075m).

Its many colonial buildings were constructed using a light-coloured pumice; worthy of special note is the incredible Santa Catalina Convent.

Arequipa is the ideal base for a two day trip to the Colca Canyon. Here you can



admire the awesome Andean Condor (wingspan of over three metres) and wonderful Canyon landscapes. During the drive there, rare vicuña are commonly spotted. Condors are seen at a point where the canyon is well over a thousand metres deep from rim to river. In the morning, condors can be seen rising majestically on the day's first thermals.

Ancient terraces line the valleys sides leading down to the deepest canyon in the world and the small villages here maintain their centuries old traditions.

If you stay an extra night at the luxurious Colca Lodge, you can relax in its fully-equipped spa or just take in the scenery from one of the natural hot spring pools down by the riverside, looking at the mountains, listening to the river roar by and trying to spot a condor soaring above you.



White water fun

Rafting

Rafting trips can take you into otherwise inaccessible environments. You might spend three adrenaline-pumping days shooting class IV to V rapids on the Rio Apurimac, or take a longer trip encompassing various ecological zones; our Tambopata trip combines, over nine days, class IV white water with serene paddling through virgin Amazon rainforest.

There are a host of day options too, in and around Cusco, a great way to prepare for or relax after a trek to Machu Picchu.

Expert rafters will love Cotohuasi - a real expedition of non-stop class 4 & 5 rapids in a truly unbelievable canyon complete with unexplored Inca cities, giant waterfalls and fresh shrimp too...

The Beaches

As you'd expect from a country with 3,000 kilometres of coastline, Peru has a good choice of beaches. The main beach season here runs from December to March, but if you are visiting outside this period, the northern coast is a good bet. With a year-round warm climate, the beaches of the Piura and Tumbes regions, such as Mancora and Punta Sal, can be used well into the winter months. The less developed southern coast offers some lovely isolated coves, among them Puerto Inca.

Peru is one of the world's top surfing nations, and some excellent surfing can be found at the beaches south of Lima (wet suit essential in winter), and all the way up to the Ecuadorean border. Some of the best waves in South America are found along Peru's north coast.

Language classes

Why learn Spanish in Peru? Because Peruvian language schools offer excellent value for money and because Peruvian Spanish is spoken clearly and thus relatively easy to learn.



Sacred Valley Mountain biking

The language school which Andean Trails works with has two centres in the Cusco area, one in Cusco itself and the other in the Sacred Valley of the Incas. The Cusco school is located in a charming colonial building close to the Plaza de Armas, while the other centre is in Urubamba, a small town in the peaceful Sacred Valley.

The schools are small, friendly and relaxed, with professional teachers who are always ready to help. Spanish lessons are available at any level, with the flexibility to combine tuition in both centres and divide classes - 2 hours each of grammar work and conversation per day - into morning and afternoon sessions. Your studies can also be combined with any number of extra-curricular activities, including trekking, rafting and mountain biking.

The Andes and upper Amazon offer some exhilarating mountain biking. We have day trips, extended single track options, longer distance rides through remote mountain ranges and a four-day trip from the Cusco highlands to the steamy Manu National Park.

That's before we start to look at the north of Peru and a full-on, eight-day expedition in Peru's Cordillera Blanca through the heart of one of the most stunning mountain environments in the Americas. Most routes combine dirt roads and tracks with occasional off-road sectors, and serious off-road routes are also available.

Get in touch today to start planning your Peru adventure!

