

PERU

The Insiders' Guide



Discover the best of Peru's Andean treks, ancient cultures, and jungle adventures with our local insiders.

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Welcome!

Whether you're pondering the mysteries of an advanced ancient culture, trekking amid the Andes' highest peaks, watching monkeys bound through the jungle, or surfing a mile-long break, this diverse country never fails to amaze and inspire.



Our Insiders' Picks of the Top 10 Experiences in Peru

Sample Peru's world-class cuisine

From classics like ceviche, to modern takes on traditional dishes, to tasty fusions like Chifa (Chinese-Peruvian cuisine), Peru's food scene is one of the world's best.

Discover Peru's other "Lost Cities"

Avoid the crowds at Machu Picchu and take a four-day trek to the mysterious

citadel of Choquequirao, which gets just a handful of visitors each day. Or ride the newly opened cable car to Kuelap, a vast fortification perched in the cloud forest of northern Peru.

Skim down a sand dune

Adrenaline junkies should head to the mirage-like town of Huacachina, Peru's ultimate sandboarding destination, with slopes up to 1,968ft (600m) long. If you're not a boarder, the dune buggy rides are just as exhilarating.

Watch for pink dolphins in the Amazon

With dense rainforest along its whole eastern border, Peru is a wildlife lover's dream, home to monkeys, otters, exotic birds, and even jaguars. But only the Iquitos region lets you explore



Pink river dolphin

the Amazon River itself, and see rare creatures like the pink freshwater dolphin.

Surf the world's longest rideable left-hander

If your idea of heaven is an endless wave, Chicama, on the central-north coast, is blessed with a cold-water break that you can often ride for more than a mile (1.6km).

Go on an epic rafting adventure

Navigate the challenging Class IV and V rapids of Cotahuasi Canyon, the world's deepest. Or drift through the wildlife-rich Tambopata Reserve in Peru's southern selva and camp out in the jungle.

Vamos de fiesta in Puno

In cities, towns, and villages across



White-water rafting

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If your idea of heaven is an endless wave, Chicama, on the central-north coast, is blessed with a cold-water break that you can often ride for more than a mile.



Scissors Dance performer

Peru, there always seems to be some kind of colorful celebration going on. But with two full weeks of dancing, music, parades, and fireworks, Puno's extravagant *Fiesta de la Virgen de la Candelaria* tops them all.

Taste Pisco at South America's oldest vineyard

Pisco, a grape-based brandy, is Peru's national spirit. There's no better place for an introduction than historic Hacienda Bodega Tacama, where the vineyards are still irrigated by a canal built by the Incas in the 15th century.

Trek to a sacred mountain

In Inca mythology, an *apu* was a powerful mountain spirit – many of Peru's highest and most iconic peaks are *apus*, including Ausangate, Salkantay, and of course, Machu Picchu itself.

Kayak at the top of the world

Lake Titicaca is the world's highest navigable lake – a paddle on its sapphire-blue waters is a magical experience (and you'll be able to see what those legendary floating islands are all about).

Climate and Weather

Peru has a varied landscape, with high mountains along its spine, a long coastline to the west, and rainforest to the east. The weather and climate can change drastically depending on where you are in the country.



Huacachina at night

Best seasons for outdoor adventures

The Peruvian winter is from May to September. This is the ideal time to head out on hikes and other outdoor adventures, since these are the driest months in the Andes mountains. However, it's also the peak time for tourism.

The exception to this is Lima, which is usually foggy and gloomy between June and August, with low temperatures and drizzle (but well worth visiting any time of year).

The best time to visit the jungle is from April to December, with peak times between May and August, when temperatures often exceed 86°F (30°C), although some say that the rainy season is best as it makes it easier to spot wildlife gathering on the dry areas of land.

December to March are the warmest months on the coast, so head to the beach to explore Lima and the coastal reserve at Paracas, or take surf lessons in Huanchaco or Mancora.

Peru's rainy season

The rainy season is from December

“**The best time to visit the jungle is from April to December, with peak times between May and August.**”

to mid-March, during the Peruvian “summer.” Try to avoid hiking in the highlands during this time as flash floods and burst river banks can create very serious hazards.

The Inca Trail, the traditional route to Machu Picchu, is closed every year in February to prevent erosion. Machu Picchu is open all year round, but is usually cloudy in the rainy season with poor visibility, so is best visited between April and October.

The Amazon rainforest is always wet and experiences rain throughout the year, but is at its wettest between December and March. Some companies won't offer camping trips during this period.

Low season in Peru

The months from September to November and March to May tend to be a good time to visit Peru; it's technically low season but the weather is relatively good, and fewer tourists means lower prices.

However, don't let the weather dictate all your plans, as Peruvian weather can be variable at any time of the year.

Where to Stay

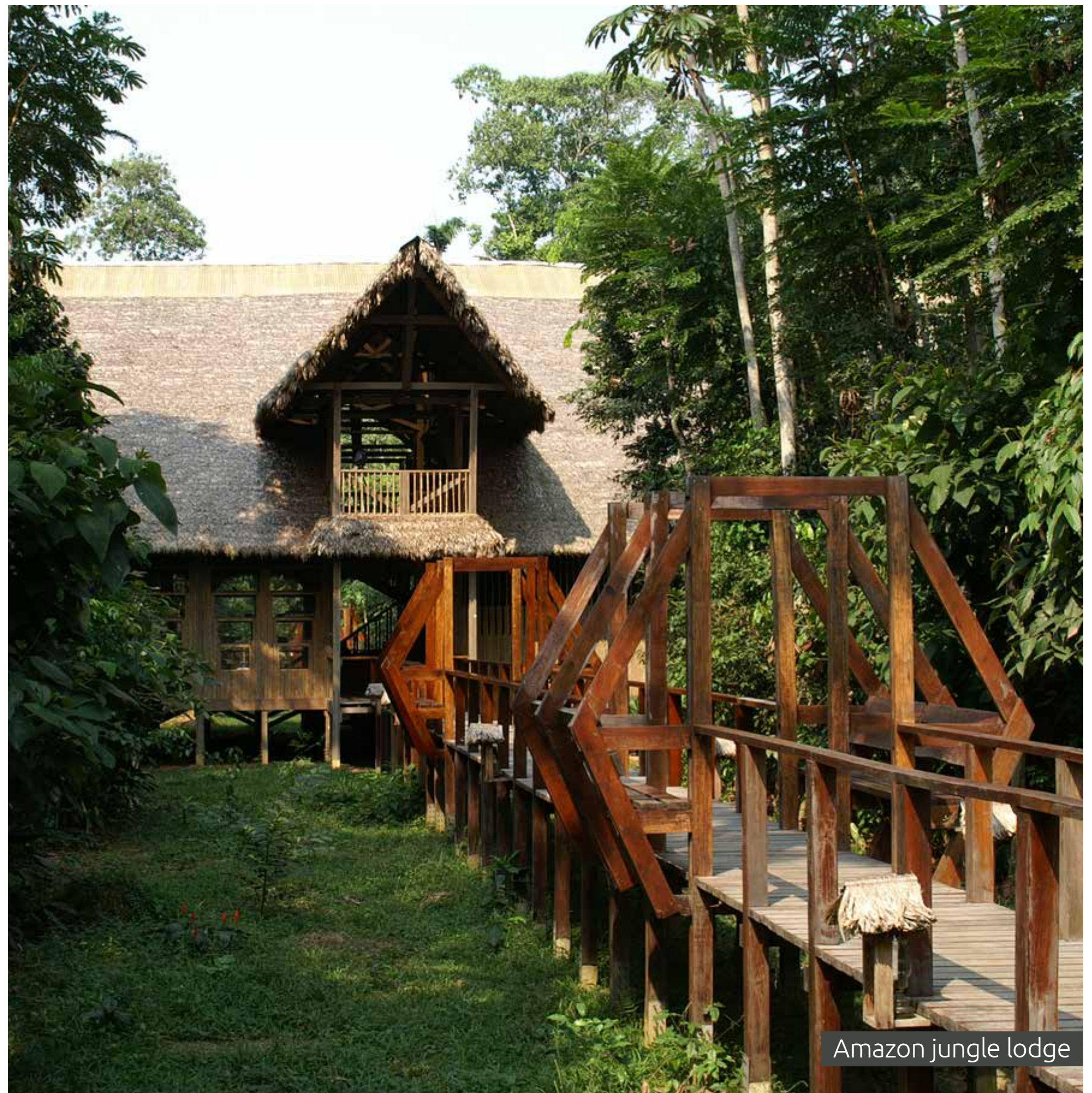
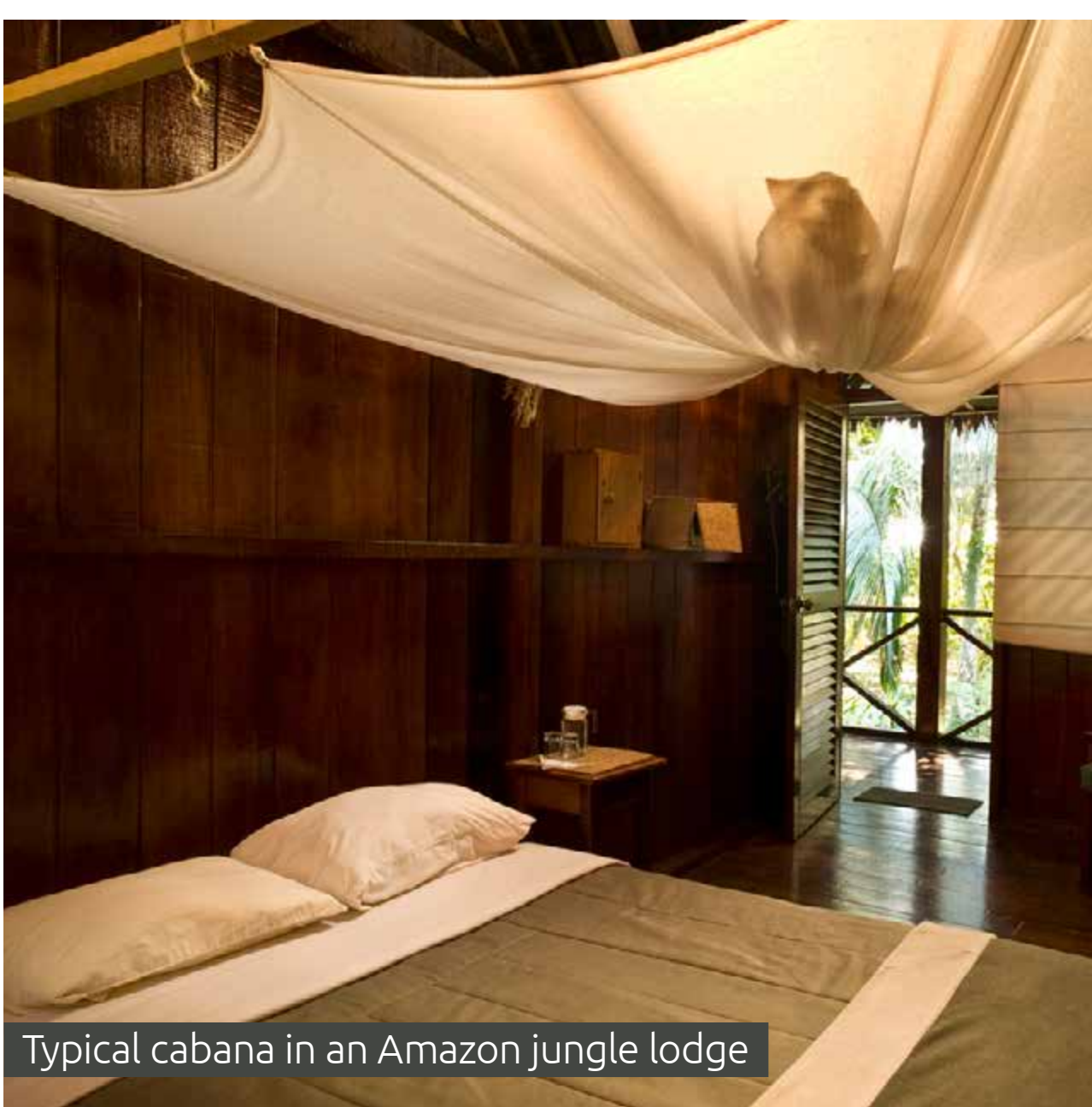
From hostels and homestays to luxury hotels, Peru offers a wide range of accommodation, whatever your budget.

Most travelers have to spend at least one night in Lima after arriving at Jorge Chavez International Airport in Callao. The majority of hotels are in the districts of Miraflores, San Isidro, and Barranco. Outside of Lima, you can experience everything from remote mountain huts to thatched-roof jungle lodges.

Traveler tips

A good rule of thumb when booking accommodation in Peru is not to make any assumptions. Double check whether you can pay with credit card and make sure to ask about Wi-Fi.

Outside of the bigger cities, accommodation tends to be more informal, and you might not be able to find a website to make a reservation. In rural areas, hot water is not a given,



so look for signs advertising *agua caliente*.

Be aware that many places don't speak English (especially outside of Lima and Cusco), so you need to either find a place that has reviews attesting to the owners speaking English, be ready to fumble through an interaction, or know at least a moderate amount of Spanish.

Hostels

Peru offers a variety of hostels that cater to different types of guests. They can be a great way to meet other travelers and can help you set up tours and activities. In Lima, a bed in a shared dorm room starts at S/. 39-47 (US \$12-15) and private rooms are around S/. 114 (US \$35). If you aren't a solo traveler, sometimes a private room in a hostel is just as economical as a shared dorm.

“Peru offers a variety of hostels that cater to different types of guests.”

Prices in Cusco are around S/. 26-32 (US \$8-10) for a shared dorm and S/. 91 (US \$28) for a private room with a shared bathroom. You'll also find specialty hostels such as mountain huts when you are trekking in areas like Huaraz and the Sacred Valley.

Hotels

You can find budget hotels from S/. 81 (US \$25) and up. These might be better deals than hostels if you're traveling in a group. Many hotels will also offer an airport shuttle if you ask ahead of time. If you have a little bit more money to spend, you can often find good deals on nicer accommodation, especially outside of Lima.

Homestays

Homestays are most common in rural areas. If you're interested in staying with a local family, there are several homestay options on the islands on Lake Titicaca and in the Sacred Valley, but make sure you find a travel agency or operator that has you pay the families directly to ensure they are being fairly compensated.

Jungle lodges

One of the highlights of Peru are the Amazon jungle lodges in destinations like Iquitos and Puerto Maldonado. These range from high-end luxury establishments to very rustic accommodation.

As most of the lodges are fairly remote, most bookings will include all meals. You'll typically pay more if you book ahead of time – it's possible



Farm in the Sacred Valley

to get better deals if you book last minute. However, it can be hard to discern exactly what you're getting.

Make sure you ask a lot of questions, such as which activities are included and whether or not the guides are English-speaking.

Expect to pay around S/. 650-810 (US \$200-250) per person for a basic two-to-three-night package. (S/. 3,890 or US \$1,200 wouldn't be unheard of for some of the five-star lodges).

General Cost Guide

Peru is a great option for budget travelers, especially outside of big cities and major tourist destinations. Food is both delicious and cheap – even more so if you avoid touristy restaurants in neighborhoods like Miraflores.

Set lunch, called "menu": S/. 13-19 (US \$4-6)

Sit-down restaurant meal: S/. 65 (US \$20)

Shared dormitory: S/. 26-47 (US \$8-15)

Private room in a hostel: S/. 91-114 (US \$28-35)

Budget hotel: S/. 81 (US \$25) and up

Jungle lodge: S/. 650-810 (US \$200-250) per person for a basic two-to-three night package

Airport taxi (Lima): S/. 50 (US \$16)

Airport taxi (Cusco): S/. 30 (US \$9.25)

Rapid transit bus ride: S/. 2.50 (\$0.75 US)

Long-haul bus, Lima to Cusco: S/. 227 (US \$70)

Long-haul bus, Lima to Arequipa: S/. 130-195 (US \$40-60)

Budget domestic flight: Under S/. 324 (US \$100)

Getting Around

Lima is usually the first stop on most travelers' itineraries. From the Peruvian capital, you can easily travel to other major destinations such as Cusco, Arequipa, and Puno by plane and long-haul bus.

Airport

When you land in Lima, the cheapest and safest option if you are staying in Miraflores is to take the new airport bus, which costs S/. 26 (US \$8) one way. For more than one person, it might be worth taking an official taxi for around S/. 50 (US \$16), which should take between 50 minutes and 1.5 hours depending on the time of day and traffic. The ten-minute taxi ride from the airport in Cusco to the city center should cost around S/. 30 (US \$9.25).

Rental cars

Renting a car in Peru is only for the very brave who are prepared to



Public transport in Lima

face bumper-to-bumper traffic with unspoken rules of the road that are only known to locals. Stop signs, crosswalks, and speed limits seem to be mere suggestions. Outside of Lima, be prepared for less-than-well-maintained roads, especially when you get off the major highways. You also want to avoid driving on rural roads after dark due to lack of lighting and hidden potholes.

Taxis

Taxis are by far the easiest and most comfortable way to get around cities. The safest option is to ask your hotel or restaurant to call a cab for you, or use an app like Uber, EasyTaxi, or TaxiBeat.

If you want to take a taxi on the street, ask a local how much it should cost to go to your destination. Negotiate the fare before you get in,

“Taxis are by far the easiest and most comfortable way to get around cities. The safest option is to ask your hotel or restaurant to call a cab for you, or use an app like Uber, EasyTaxi, or TaxiBeat.”



Collectivo



Traffic in downtown Cusco

as taxis are not metered. If a driver inflates the price, wave him on and there will be another one behind him waiting for your fare. There is no expectation to tip.

Public transportation in Lima

Lima has a well-maintained rapid transit bus system, the Metropolitano, which runs north and south between the city's main districts. You first need to buy a travel card for S/. 4.5 (US \$1.40), which you can then top up at all Metropolitano bus stations. A single ride should cost S/. 2.50 (US \$0.75).

There are regular and express buses, so make sure your bus stops at the station you need. Note that the red seats are reserved for the elderly, disabled, and pregnant. As most of Lima's ten million residents use public transportation, avoid traveling at rush hour.

There is also a confusing system of vans and minibuses, called *combis*, that feature a guy leaning out the door, shouting various destinations. Those always entail an adventure, and might be best left to the locals.

Long-haul buses

For inter-city travel, Peru's long-haul buses are quite comfortable and inexpensive. It's usually worth paying an extra S/. 65 (US \$20) for a "bus-cama" VIP seat, i.e. a "bus bed" that reclines flat. But, the windy, slow-going roads through the mountains can mean very long travel times despite relatively short distances.

The bus ride from Lima to Cusco, for example, is upwards of 20 hours, while a flight takes less than two hours. The trip costs approximately S/. 227 (US \$70). Lima to Arequipa takes 17 hours and costs S/. 130-195 (US \$40-60).

Internal flights

For those short on time, it's usually worth it to splurge a bit for internal flights. LATAM is the main national airline, but travelers should beware that it often advertises cut-rate prices for Peruvian residents. As a foreigner without a residence permit, you'd need to pay an extra S/. 243 (US \$75) each way if you accidentally book a resident fare.

There are several budget carriers, such as Peruvian Airlines, LC Peru, and Star Peru, that offer reasonable domestic flights for less than S/. 324 (US \$100).

Peruvian Cuisine

The best way to start a conversation with a Peruvian is to talk about the food, of which they are understandably proud.

Chef Gaston Acurio helped put Peruvian cuisine on the gastronomic map, but it's the country's biodiversity and unique mix of cultural influences that really make its cuisine stand out.

Sampling Peru's culinary spread is a little like taking a tour of the country's three main environments: mountains, coast, and jungle. Peru has also had waves of immigrants from Spain, Africa, and Asia, who have all made their mark on the country's culinary identity.

What to eat in Peru

Peruvian food is generally hearty. Many dishes contain meat and potatoes – over 4,000 varieties grow in the Andes – and Peruvians don't consider a meal complete without plenty of rice. Peruvian food is not typically spicy; many dishes contain the flavors of aji chili and rocoto peppers, but not always the heat.

Traditional dishes

The most common – and arguably most traditional – dishes are *lomo saltado*, marinated beef with onions and tomatoes, and *pollo a la brasa*, chicken typically roasted over a wood fire. Seafood lovers will rejoice at the myriad of ceviche options, from the classic lime-juice marinated fish with aji and red



Potatoes for sale in Arequipa

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It's the country's biodiversity and unique mix of cultural influences that really make its cuisine stand out

onions to more creative interpretations. A typical side dish is *papa a la huancaína* (potatoes with huancaína sauce). And for the adventurous, there's *cuy*, roasted guinea pig.

Modern cuisine

Lima has a fantastic restaurant scene. Just one of many options, Panchita will introduce you to classics like *anticuchos*, *adobo* (an Arequipan speciality), *aji de gallina*, and *pachamanca*. Amaz offers a modern take on jungle dishes such as *tacacho* and *cecina* (a kind of bacon). To check out Gaston Acurio's food empire, book a table at internationally-renowned Astrid & Gaston or the slightly less expensive Tanta, which also has a location in Arequipa.

Must-try drinks

Don't miss the most famous Peruvian drink – the Pisco sour. Or join the locals and sip a *chilcano*, typically made with Pisco, lime, and ginger ale. Like wine, there are enough varieties of Pisco to suit every palate and budget. For a classic Pisco bar, check out Antigua Taberna Queirolo in the residential Lima neighborhood of Pueblo Libre.

Cultural Highlights

In every region of this varied land you'll find remnants of the past, from the secrets of ancient civilizations to some of the best cultural festivals in South America.

Top archaeological destinations

Peru has preserved much of its ancient history to astound visitors. If you're fascinated by the achievements of centuries-old civilizations, these sites should be on your itinerary.

Machu Picchu

Long regarded as *the* cultural stop in Peru, and indeed South America, the ancient city of Machu Picchu is almost too popular. In recent years, limits have been set on the number of visitors who can explore the ruins in an effort to preserve this UNESCO World Heritage site. Nonetheless, it's a magical place and one of the world's most iconic destinations.

Caral

Peru's most ancient site is located 124mi (200km) from Lima in the Peruvian desert. Covering over 1,546 acres (626 hectares), this site features pyramid-shaped structures and circular courts. At 5,000 years old it's the oldest center of civilization in the Americas.

Kuelap

Located at an elevation of 10,000ft



Inti Raymi Festival, Cusco

(3,050m) in the cloud forests of northern Peru, this fortified citadel was built by the Chachapoyas people. Round houses, battlements, and steep staircases are hidden inside the walls of this impressive structure thought to have once been home to 3,000 inhabitants.

Carajía

In the Utcubamba Valley, about 30mi (50km) from Chachapoyas, Carajía is the site of impressive sarcophagi. These giant coffins, standing eight feet tall, are located above a river gorge and are remarkably well preserved.

Nazca lines

Located between the provinces of Nazca and Palpa, this unusual ancient cultural highlight is best seen from the air. The enormous geoglyphs were left in the desert over an area of 193 mi² (500 km²) by the Nazca civilization. The hundreds

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Ancient Cultures of Peru

Though the Incas, who built Machu Picchu, are the best known, Peru has been home to a wide range of ancient civilizations and cultures:

Chachapoyas

Also called the “warriors of the clouds,” the Chachapoyas people pre-date the Incas and lived in the Amazonas Region between 900 and 1450 AD.

Inca

The mighty Inca civilization was the largest ever in the Americas and the largest in the world at the time they ruled.

Nazca

The Nazca people lived on the southern coast between 200 BC and 600 AD. They’re known for those mysterious lines drawn in the desert and for their pottery.

Chavin

This civilization lived in the northern and central Andes between 900 and 200 BC. They were amazing artists with a penchant for imagery of wild cats and other fanged creatures.



Caral

of designs feature human and animal depictions and geometric patterns which were made over 1,500 years ago.

Cultural festivals

Although much of Peru's history is found in its ancient settlements, many traditional festivals are still held today and are well worth experiencing.

Otherwise known as the “Celebration of the Sun,” *Inti Raymi* takes place in the Fortress of Sacsayhuaman above Cuzco on June 24th each year. Actors recreate the historical significance of praising Inti, the sun god, and lead a procession to the fortress where offerings are made.

Ayacucho, in the south-central Andes, is the setting for an annual, weekend-long *Carnaval Ayacuchano* in February/March, which features a parade of dancers and musicians in traditional costumes marching to the Plaza de Armas.

Across the country, the *Fiesta de la Cruz* (festival of the cross) features folk music, processions with decorated

crucifixes, and dancing – most notably the scissors dance, which used to be performed perilously on top of church bell towers!

For a week in November, Puno is the most festive place to be. Follow the procession from Lake Titicaca as Peruvians celebrate the first Inca emperor with music and dancing.

Social etiquette and local customs

Peruvians are rightly proud of their culture. Drinking coca tea or chewing the leaves of the coca plant is an important tradition and not akin to recreational drug use, so speak about this practice with reverence.

You’ll likely take lots of photos during your trip, but it’s always polite to request permission when you have people as subjects in your pictures – a tip is sometimes appreciated.

Refusing a dinner invitation is also regarded as bad manners. With all the delicious flavors of Peruvian cuisine, this is an easy custom to respect.

Language and phrases

English is not widely spoken outside tourist areas. Luckily, the Peruvian Spanish accent is relatively easy for Spanish-language beginners to understand.

Introductions and greetings

Hello *Hola*

My name is... *Me llamo...*

How are you? *¿Cómo estás?*

Nice to meet you *Mucho gusto*

Good morning *Buenos días*

Good afternoon *Buenas tardes*

Good night *Buenas noches*

Everyday travel phrases

Do you speak English? *¿Habla Inglés?*

I don't speak Spanish *No hablo Español*

Can I take your picture? *¿Le puedo tomar una foto?*

Can you take my picture? *¿Me puedes tomar una foto?*

Please *Por favor*

Excuse me *Disculpe*

Thank you *Gracias*

You're welcome *De nada*

Basic directions

I am lost *Estoy perdido/a*

To the right *A la derecha*

To the left *A la izquierda*

Stop (verb) *Pare*

Stop (noun) *Parada*



Locals on Taquile

Continue *Sigue*

Where is the bathroom? *¿Donde esta el baño?*

Ordering and shopping

I would like to order... *Me gustaría pedir...*

How much does this cost? *¿Cuánto cuesta esto?*

The bill, please *La cuenta, por favor*

Medical and emergencies

Help me! *¡Socorro!*

I need a doctor *Necesito un doctor*

I have altitude sickness *Tengo soroche*

I need a pharmacy *Necesito una farmacia*

Where is the tourism police? *¿Dónde está la oficina de la Policía de Turismo?*

I have an emergency *Tengo una emergencia*

Responsible Tourism

Tourism is on the rise in this extraordinary Andean country. Here's how to minimize your impact.

Use less plastic

You can't drink the tap water in Peru, but you can reduce the number of plastic bottles you throw away by buying water in bulk and refilling a reusable bottle.

Volunteer

Several organizations offer short- and long-term volunteer opportunities and internships in Lima, Cusco, the Sacred Valley, and the Amazon. Opportunities include teaching English and working with conservation initiatives. Make sure the organizations work closely with the local community and are responsive to local needs.

Support local artisans

Whenever possible, visit artisans' workshops and buy directly from them. For ethically-sourced handcrafts, visit these shops in Barranco in Lima: Dédalo, Artesanos Don Bosco, and Artesanías Las Pallas. In Cusco, visit the non-profit Centro de Textiles Tradicionales. You'll pay more, but the shops ensure artisans receive a fair price for their work.

Alternatives to Machu Picchu

The most famous Incan ruins are

starting to feel the wear and tear of mass tourism – over 1.4 million people visited this UNESCO World Heritage site in 2016. Fortunately, there are several lesser known but highly worthwhile archaeological sites in Peru that you don't have to share with 2,500 other visitors.

One example is Choquequirao, Peru's second lost city – Hiram Bingham stumbled across it in 1909, two years before he found Machu Picchu. But because it requires a four-day trek to get there and back, more people visit Machu Picchu in a single day than visit Choquequirao in an entire year. Only about 30-40 percent of the site has been uncovered, leaving plenty of mysteries to unravel.

Currently, the only way to access Choquequirao is by foot, but the Peruvian government has announced plans to build a road and a cable car. The most common starting point is the village of Cachora, a four-hour bus ride from Cusco. To support the local economy, hire a local guide in Cachora rather than one in Cusco.

Kuelap, located in region of Amazonas near the village of Tingo, is also a great alternative to Machu Picchu. This huge fortified city was built around 800 AD by the Chachapoyas culture, and is thought to be the largest stone ruin in the New World. Just getting here used to be quite a journey, but flights now run from Lima to Jaen, about four to five hours by ground transportation from Kuelap. A newly opened cable car takes visitors up to the ruins from Nuevo Tingo.

“Several organizations offer short- and long-term volunteer opportunities and internships in Lima, Cusco, the Sacred Valley, and the Amazon.”

Safety and Scams

The Peruvian government is working hard to protect tourists and is actively pursuing the criminals who target them – but travelers should still be on guard against petty crime, muggings, and scams.

Crime

Peru's penchant for petty thievery is infamous. This doesn't mean you need to be forever clutching your valuables to your chest, but you should practice your street smarts.

Register your passport at the embassy in Lima (this can save you days of precious holiday time if your documents are lost or stolen). Don't carry more cash than you need for the day, keep cameras packed away when not in use, and don't leave bags or purses where they can be easily snatched.

Scams

Credit card fraud is widespread in Peru, so always keep your card in sight when making purchases. If the shop assistant is taking too long to give you a receipt, there's a good chance they're skimming your card. Keep an eye on suspicious transactions in your bank account while traveling and after you arrive home.

Muggings

The Sacsayhuaman ruins overlooking Cusco are notorious for muggings, so go in a group. Muggings have also been



Central Cusco at night

reported in Lima, Arequipa, and Cusco. Avoid walking in dark, quiet areas by yourself, especially at night. Even if you're traveling with a group, it's a good idea to take a taxi after sundown.

Armed criminals have also been known to target foreigners while cruising in the Amazon region. Check with your cruise company or boat tour operator what their security arrangements are. Many have armed police on board their vessels 24/7 for the safety of passengers and staff.

Kidnapping

“Express kidnappings,” where travelers are forced to extract money from various ATMs, have become more frequent. In most cases, the victim is released quickly after the withdrawal limit is reached. Having a separate traveling account you can top-up as needed means you won't be left penniless if this happens to you.

“**Credit card fraud is widespread in Peru, so always keep your card in sight when making purchases.**”



Terpsichore

Ayahuasca preparation

Women's safety

Female tourists can feel generally confident while in Peru, but should expect to draw some attention, especially if traveling alone.

Be aware of the possibility of drink spiking – hallucinogenic plants have been used to render tourists senseless before a robbery or assault. Never leave your drink unattended and don't drink anything you didn't buy yourself, or at least see poured.

LGBTQ travel safety

Peruvians tolerate homosexuality among foreign visitors. However, the situation for locals remains a struggle, which is why many LGBTQ Peruvians don't publicly identify as homosexual.

Although homosexuality is legal, same-sex marriage is not. While gays and lesbians can serve openly in the military and transgender people can legally change their gender, Peru – with strong ties to Catholicism – remains a deeply conservative and traditional society.

Public displays of affection among same-sex couples are highly unusual.

The capital, Lima, is the most accepting of LGBTQ people. Beyond that, the tourist towns of Cuzco, Arequipa, and Trujillo tend to be more tolerant than the norm. It must be noted that the rainbow flag often seen around Cuzco and the Andes is *not* a gay pride flag: It's the flag of the Inca empire.

Peru's Tourism Police

If you are the victim of theft or assault, the *Policia de Turismo* (Tourism Police) should be your first port of call.

Established specially to protect you and the lucrative tourism industry, they speak at least some English and are trained in handling all sorts of crimes against tourists.

Due to a string of false reporting of theft around tourist spots, you may be questioned quite sternly about your testimony. Don't take offense – they're just doing their job. Being polite and cooperative is the best way to speed up the process and get you back to your holiday.

Ayahuasca

Sacred to the indigenous people of the Amazon, the brew made from the ayahuasca vine has been used in traditional ceremonies administered by shamans for thousands of years.

While many travelers seek ayahuasca retreats in order to find enlightenment, there have been several cases in recent years where things have gone very wrong, resulting in psychotic damage, crimes against others, and even death.

Ayahuasca retreats in South America are largely unregulated. Retreats which tend to have safeguards in place aren't cheap, but you are putting your life in their hands. Reputable retreats will offer many services and safety measures such as advance health screening of guests, numerous well-trained female and male staff on hand, and plenty of post-ceremony support.

If you do plan to take a retreat, read reviews, do the research, and ask as many questions of the venue as possible.

Visas and Vaccinations

A country that features both tropical jungle and multiple peaks above 20,600ft (6,300m) will require a little advance planning to visit.

Visa requirements

Visitors from most countries do not need a visa to enter Peru for tourism, but your passport should be valid for at least six months to avoid problems at the airport. The length of stay granted ranges from 30 to 183 days, and can't usually be extended.

If you're coming into Peru by land, make sure you get both an exit stamp from the country you are leaving and an entry stamp into Peru from each appropriate immigration office, or you may run into issues later on.

Vaccinations

There are no specific vaccines required to enter Peru, but hepatitis A and tetanus are strongly recommended, and hepatitis B, rabies, tuberculosis, typhoid, and yellow fever are also recommended to stay on the safe side..

In particular, a yellow fever vaccine is recommended if you are traveling beyond Lima, Cusco, Machu Picchu and the Inca Trail, or below 7,546ft (2,300m). Proof of vaccination may be required before re-entry to your country of residence.

There is a potential risk from zika, and a low risk of malaria in the Amazon

areas and in the coastal areas north of Chiclayo. Wear long trousers and sleeves around dusk and dawn, and plenty of insect repellent, especially in low altitude and jungle areas. You might also consider bringing a mosquito net.

Altitude sickness

Altitude or elevation sickness can occur in highland areas, including Cusco. The Inca Trail trek to Machu Picchu reaches over 13,800ft (4,000m) above sea level, so if you plan to hike here or in other mountain areas, make sure your insurance covers high-altitude trekking.

When you arrive in Cusco, especially if you're flying in from lower elevations, take a few days to acclimatize. Some shortness of breath and fatigue is normal, and your body should naturally adjust to the thinner air. The prescription medication acetazolamide (Diamox) can help prevent and treat the effects of elevation sickness.

Drink plenty of water, and avoid alcohol and smoking, as these both make the effects worse. Ibuprofen or paracetamol can help with mild headaches, but if you feel sick or become dizzy or disoriented, seek medical help immediately.

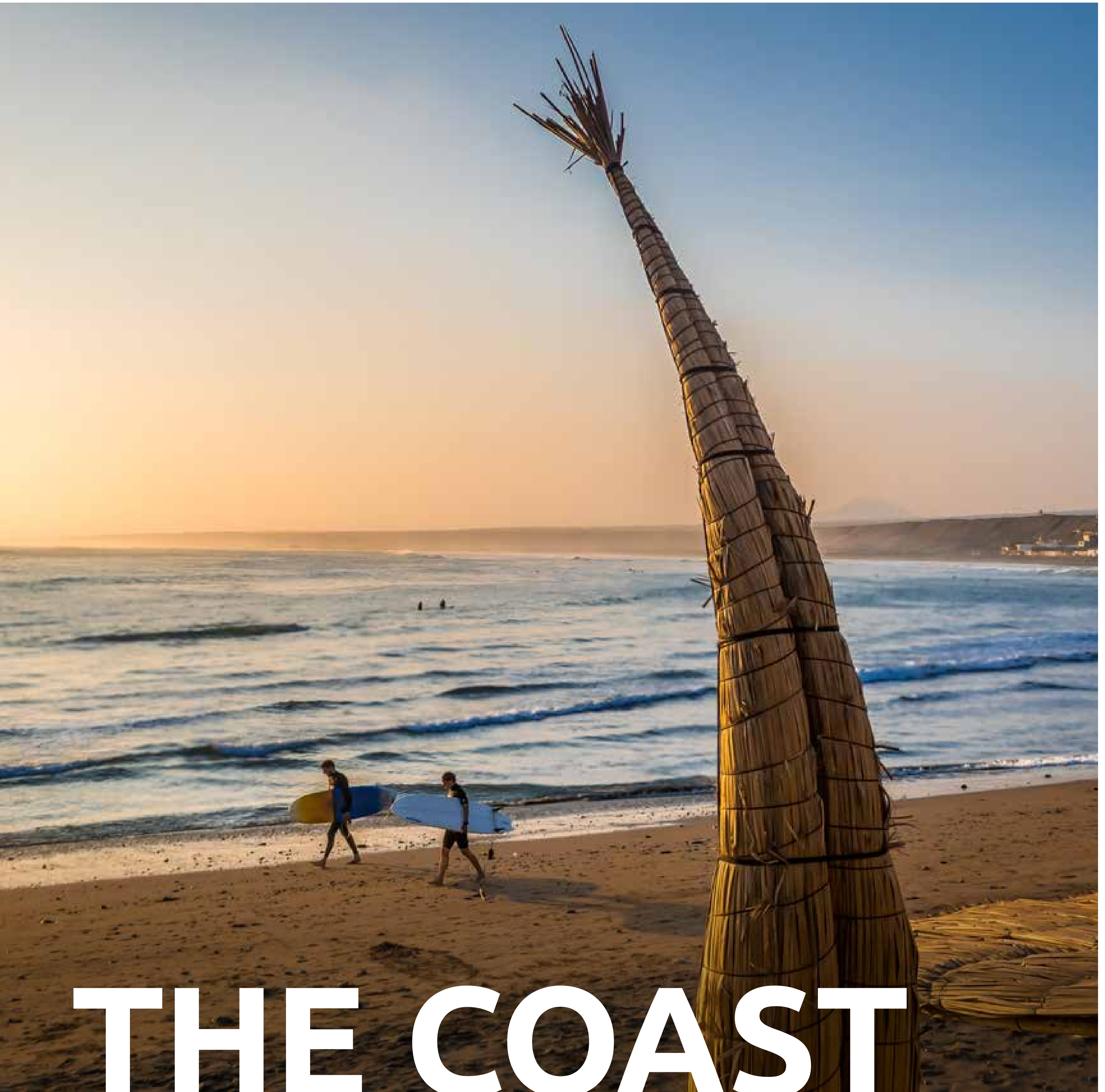
Altitude sickness can, in extreme cases, be fatal, so let someone know if you feel unwell.

Trip preparation

Make an appointment with your doctor at least six weeks before you travel to discuss vaccinations, anti-malarial medication, and Diamox.

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When you arrive in Cusco, especially if you're flying in from lower elevations, take a few days to acclimatize.



THE COAST

From the cosmopolitan capital city of Lima, to the laid-back surf towns and ancient citadels of the north, to the soaring sand dunes and rustic Pisco bodegas in the south, Peru's coast is one long adventure – 1,500mi (2,414km) long, to be exact.

48 Hours in Lima

With an internationally renowned foodie culture, plenty of history, and genuinely great waves, there's no better spot than Lima to discover the local's Peru.

Lima's historic center

Originally built to be Spain's colonial capital in South America, Lima boasts some impressive architecture.

At the UNESCO Heritage site Plaza San Martin, you'll find the luxurious El Gran Hotel Bolivar, visited by the likes of Hemingway and Walt Disney. Officially a national monument, El Bolivar also serves the largest Pisco Sour in the city.

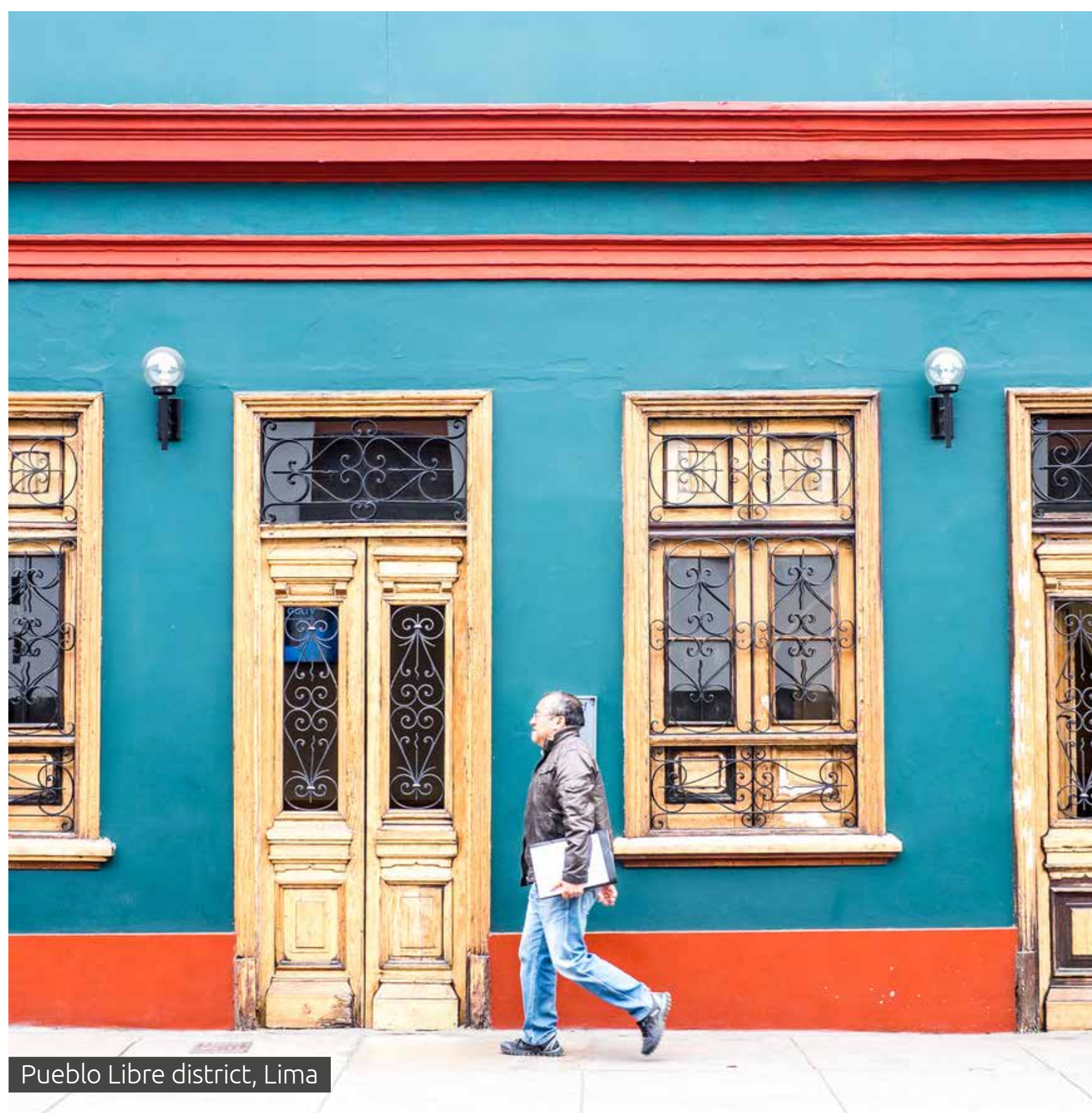
Walk down Jirón de la Unión, a historical meeting point for intellectuals, until you hit the Plaza de Armas, the old town's main square. During the *Fiestas Patrias* on July 28th (Independence Day) it's full of dancing, parades, and fireworks.

Miraflores

Hop on one of the city's modern buses to Lima's most fashionable neighborhood, packed with famous restaurants, outdoor offerings, and a thriving nightlife.

Bike along the Malécon for unrivaled ocean views, then head down to the beach for a surf at Punta Roquitas.

Next, check out Huaca Pucllana, an



Pueblo Libre district, Lima

ancient seven-platformed pyramid in the middle of Miraflores, Then, hit the Mercado Indio for alpaca goods or Agua y Tierra for souvenirs from the Amazon.

Barranco

This is Lima's bohemian neighbourhood. Begin with a visit to the Museum of Modern Art, followed by a stroll along the seafront.

Enjoy the colorful buildings and street art while you munch on *picarones* – Peru's famous, donut-like street food – before heading to the Bajada de Baños for sunset.

When your stomach grumbles, make a beeline for La Picanteria in Surquillo, a hideaway with some of the city's best seafood. Or try Insolina for *comida criollo*, an eclectic fusion of cuisines that's Peruvian food like grandma used to make.

“

At the UNESCO Heritage site Plaza San Martin, you'll find the luxurious El Gran Hotel Bolivar, visited by the likes of Hemingway and Walt Disney.

THE COAST

Nightlife

After dinner, party-goers descend on Plaza Kennedy in Miraflores, where you'll find the city's hippest bars. La Emolientería is one of the most popular local haunts, or for a unique experience try a *peña* – they're late night cabarets hosting traditional music, dance, and comedy. De Rompe y Raja is quite authentic.

End your night at Ayahuasca, a three-story colonial mansion-turned-bar that's a traveler favorite.

Shopping

The next morning, perk up with a cup of *emoliente*, a traditional elixir of quinoa, aloe, pollen, and local herbs sold at street carts. After breakfast at the hip El Pan de la Chola, it's time to shop.

Start in San Isidro, an upscale area neighborhood full of boutiques to peruse. Bibliophiles will swoon over El Virrey's vintage book room stocked with rare editions. Then head to Dédalo, a colonial *casona* filled with unique contemporary crafts and a back-patio bar, or try the funky art gallery and boutique Vernácula in Barranco.

Peruvian classics

National Ceviche Day is June 28th, but any day is perfect to enjoy this tangy, citrus-cooked seafood dish. Wait in line for *Ceviche de Mero* at La Paisana (open only for lunch), or make the trek out to Chez Wong's, a tiny eatery that might be the best cevicheria in Lima. Peruvian dignitaries and celebrities



Miraflores coastline

regularly stop at Chez Wong's to enjoy the iconic dish from its working-class roots.

Wash down lunch with another Peruvian classic – the Pisco Sour. The Antigua Taberna Queirolo (aka El Queirolo) is a well-loved watering hole in Pueblo Libre that's been serving Piscos since the 1880's. You'll be nearby the Gran Mercado Artesanal if you're still souvenir hunting.

Catacombs, Chinatown, and ceramics

Walk off your Piscos underground on a tour of the Catacombs of San Francisco de Lima Basilica, lined with bones arranged in geometric patterns. Then take a stroll through Barrio Chino, Lima's Chinatown, for Chinese architecture and a host of incredible Chifa restaurants (that's Chinese-Peruvian cuisine).

No trip is complete without a stop at the Larco Museum. This private collection of pre-Columbian art is also home to the world's largest collection of erotic ceramics – a unique way to end your stay in Lima.

“**National Ceviche Day is June 28th, but any day is perfect to enjoy this tangy, citrus-cooked seafood dish.**”

Where to stay in Lima

Barranco Second Home, a five-room *casona* with a swimming pool and ocean views

Casa Nuestra, a colorful hotel-esque homestay with roof terrace and breakfast

Miraflores Residencial Miraflores, an eight suite B&B with high ceilings and family-style breakfast

Trujillo and the North

From famous surf breaks to ancient cities, the northern coast of Peru is a dreamscape for the adventurous traveler.

Trujillo

Beyond the shopping malls and noisy sprawl of Peru's third largest city are the modestly preserved remnants of its glamorous colonial past.

Poke your head into the courtyards and restaurants near the Plaza de Armas to discover fading frescos, white-gloved waiters, and other tokens of Trujillo's former sugar-cane wealth.

If cities aren't your thing, go sandboarding at the Laguna de Conache, about 40 minutes away. Take a *combi* (public van) for a few dollars or join a day-tour for about S/. 65 (US \$20).

Chan Chan

The largest pre-Columbian city in the Americas feels like a graphic designer's fantasy. Sea-themed geometric patterns adorn streets, walls, and plazas where 60,000 Chimú people once lived. It's S/. 10 (US \$3) to get in, or join a tour in Trujillo that includes other ancient temples for around S/. 40 (US \$12.30).

Huanchaco

Credited as the 5,000-year-old birthplace of surfing, Huanchaco has an easygoing vibe that makes it a comfortable base for exploring the area or learning to surf. Prepare to stay far longer than planned.



Ventanillas de Combayo

Dama de Cao

This stunning museum houses the mummified remains of a high priestess who ruled the Moche of the Chicama Valley. You can see her elaborately tattooed body through a trippy arrangement of mirrors. It's worth getting a private taxi for around S/.150 (US \$46) plus the S/. 10 (US \$3) entrance fee, or join a tour from Huanchaco or Trujillo for S/. 50 (US \$15.50).

Chicama

This town is famous for having the longest wave in the world, accessible to almost every level of surfer. There's some splurge-worth accommodation in this otherwise sleepy fishing village.

Pacasmayo

One of the best-preserved colonial town centers in Peru is off the radar of most travelers. Colorful buildings line the waterfront, which is a kite-surfer's playground.

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This town is famous for having the longest wave in the world, accessible to almost every level of surfer.

THE COAST

Cajamarca

This ancient city is best known for Peru's finest cheeses, mushrooms, and dulce-de-leche, but it's also where the Incan ruler Atahualpa was executed by conquistador Francisco Pizarro.

Visit the eerie funerary enclosures carved into cliffs at the Ventanillas de Otuzco and Cambayo, and relax at the popular Banos del Inca hot springs, where you can rent a private pool by the half hour.

Kuelap

Travelers seeking the beauty of Machu Picchu without the crowds head to this vast stone fortification perched in the cloud forest. It houses over 450 structures built by the pre-Incan Chachapoya people.

Hike for four hours and 4,921ft (1,500m) up from Tingo Viejo or take a cable car through 20 minutes of breathtaking Andean vistas for S/. 20 soles (US \$6) plus another S/. 20 entrance fee.

Lambayeque and Sipan

Most travelers miss out on the charming streets and famous King Kong cakes of Lambayeque on their way to the shamanistic *mercado de brujos* in Chiclayo.

Stay in a restored colonial hotel near the main square and walk to the museum of Sipan, a wealthy lord of the Moche people who was buried with his entire family, entourage of guards, and treasures beyond a grave robber's wildest dreams.

Tucume

These layered pyramids built by several



Incan baths, Cajamarca

civilizations are known as "Purgatory" by the locals. You won't find any night tours of this site thanks to a long history of creepy vibes, starting with conquistadors throwing non-believers to their deaths from the top.

Lobitos

If you're looking for a ghost town vibe a la an old Western film, this out-of-the-way surfer's paradise will not disappoint. Experienced surfers will find a variety of fast and barrelly lefts, and beginner lessons are also available.

Catacaos

This bustling market of regional goods is northern Peru's answer to the handicraft heaven of Cusco. You'll find excellent hammocks, leather goods, straw hats, baskets, and silver.

Mancora

Peru's party-happy head here for the waves and year-round sun. The mangroves of Tumbes are a short trip away and worth exploring with a qualified guide. For quiet relaxation, Los Organos, El Ñuro, or El Colan are the prettiest beaches on the North Coast.

“Travelers seeking the beauty of Machu Picchu without the crowds head to this vast stone fortification perched in the cloud forest.”

Ica and the South

Hidden desert oases, ancient geoglyphs, and rustic Pisco bodegas make this a uniquely unmissable part of Peru.

The line of dusty towns along Peru's southern coast might not look like much upon first inspection, but explore them and you'll find enough cultural and adventure activities to keep even the most adrenaline-fueled travelers' blood pumping.

Wildlife in Paracas

Straight down the Pan American Highway from Lima, the town of Pisco doesn't offer much of interest – most visitors bypass it for neighboring Paracas. From here, two-hour speed boats (S/. 50 or US \$15.30) skim across the waves to Islas Ballestas. Dubbed the “Poor Man's Galapagos,” these rocky islands are a riot of toddling Humboldt penguins, dozing sea lions, colonies of rare blue-footed boobies, and lots of stinky guano.

As the boats skirt around the rocks, keep an eye on the water, too: between August and October, you might spot Humpback whales.

Across the bay, the barren dunes of Reserva Nacional Paracas are similarly remarkable for wildlife: over 200 bird species, including Chilean flamingos, have been sighted. The best viewing is at dawn at the bay outside the museum, located 1.5mi (2.5km) from the main



Cathedral Rock Formation, Paracas National Reserve

entrance.

There are camping facilities here, but check in with the park ranger for safety updates, as robberies have been known in the reserve.

Bodegas in Ica

Home to Peru's national spirit, Ica's a great place to spend an afternoon learning about and tasting the local tipple. 20 minutes away by taxi, Hacienda Bodega Tacama, the oldest vineyard and Pisco producer in South America, has tours to suit everyone, from wine aficionado to Pisco virgin.

Sandboards in Huacachina

For a more active adventure, it's a ten-minute taxi journey from Ica to the mirage-like town of Huacachina. A disorientating array of hostels and restaurants have sprung up around a small lagoon wedged between sand

“
Home to Peru's national spirit, Ica's a great place to spend an afternoon learning about and tasting the local tipple.”

THE COAST



Hummingbird figure, Nazca Lines

dunes. While it's less of an oasis of calm than previously, it remains Peru's ultimate sandboarding destination.

Tours (S/. 50 or US \$15.30 for two hours) strap you into a 4x4 dune buggy, which speeds across the desert before letting you out to skim down the dunes on a board. Sand isn't soft like snow, so start slowly and don't be cocky – you'll save yourself some painful bruises.

If you're happier on two feet, stretch your legs with a 20-minute climb to the dune above the town, where you can watch the otherworldly landscape disappearing into the hazy dusk at sunset, or the spray of sand as the pros shred down the slope.

Accommodation for all price ranges is available, but as the lagoon isn't ideal for swimming, consider splurging on a place with a pool – it gets fiendishly hot here during the day.

The Nazca Lines

One of Peru's most recognizable ancient landmarks, the mysterious, UNESCO World Heritage Nazca lines comprise 300 geometric shapes carved into the desert by a long-vanished culture – and

no one really knows why.

Skip the viewpoint 12.5mi (20km) north of Nazca – the lines are far better seen from the air. 30-minute, five-seater airplane trips (S/. 261 or US \$80) take you over 13 shapes, including a hummingbird and a condor. Visibility is better and turbulence less likely before around 10:30am, when the haze starts to obscure the lines.

Be sure to research reputable airlines in Nazca, as it's not worth risking your life to save a few soles.

Adventures in Lunahuaná

A slice of green in the barren desert, Lunahuaná runs parallel to the ribbon-like Río Cañete.

Though a newcomer on Peru's tourist scene, this action-packed village is one of the top playgrounds for white water rafting in the whole continent. Expect everything from Class III to V rapids, and to pay S/. 100 (US \$30.60) for a day's tour. Horse-riding trips (S/. 25 or US \$7.65) and canopy zip lines (S/. 40 or US \$12.25) are also on offer in the valley.

Criollo culture in Chincha

A bit further south along the main highway, Chincha has a unique heritage: it's home to the descendants of black slaves brought from Africa by the Spanish.

For the best insight into their *criollo* culture, visit during the *Verano Negro* festival in February or *Fiesta de las Danzas Negras* in November, when the town erupts into a chaotic whirl of dancing, music, and food showcasing the region's Peruvian-Afro lineage.

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One of Peru's most recognizable ancient landmarks, the mysterious, UNESCO World Heritage Nazca lines comprise 300 geometric shapes carved into the desert by a long-vanished culture.



THE HIGHLANDS

For many travelers, the Peruvian highlands are synonymous with Machu Picchu – but there's much more to discover, from the tallest mountain range in the New World, to the deepest canyon on the planet, to remote Andean villages steeped in tradition.

THE HIGHLANDS

48 Hours in Cusco

Cusco is constantly bustling with tourists prepping for or returning from Machu Picchu, yet the international influence has integrated beautifully with the local lifestyle.

With an abundance of excellent restaurants, awe-inspiring churches, and busy market places, there's always something to draw you back to Cusco – or keep you extending your stay.

The Boleto Turistico

A *Boleto Turistico* (tourist ticket) is required to see most of the important sights in Cusco and the Sacred Valley. You can buy the full ticket, which includes 14 sights and is valid for ten days, for S/. 13 (US \$40). Or you can buy tickets for three different circuits – Cusco museums, Cusco Inca sites, or Sacred Valley sites – for S/. 70 (US \$21.60) each. These are valid for one to two days only. Boletos can be purchased at the entrance to most of the sights, or at the COSITUC office at Avenida Del Sol 103 in central Cusco.

Plaza de Armas

Start off your tour at this vibrant square in the heart of the city. At its center is the statue of Inca ruler Pachacuti. Surrounding it you'll find restaurants, shops, and *La Catedral*, a dramatic piece of architecture built with stones taken from the nearby



Fruit market, Cusco

Sacsayhuaman fortress. If you're lucky, you'll be in Cusco during one of the city's many festivals and see parades around the Plaza.

San Blas

Next, it's a (steep) uphill walk to the artisan neighborhood of San Blas for a stroll through the shops. Check out the ornate altar in the Iglesia San Blas, then stop at the San Pedro Market, a bustling, open-air food market. Grab empanadas or stop at Govinda's food stall for spectacular vegan treats.

Koricancha and the Museum of Pre-Columbian Art

Head back down the hill to find the twelve-angled stone, which was part of the wall of the ancient Hatunrumiyoc Palace and is a prime example of the Inca's remarkably precise dry-stone masonry.

Where to stay

Milhouse Hostel is a popular spot with comfy beds, large lockers, and free luggage storage during your hike.

Casa San Blas Boutique is a quaint offering in a renovated 17th century house with city-view balconies.



Cusco Plaza de Armas

Then, head off to the Inca Sun Temple, Koricancha, which was once lined with sheets of gold. It was ransacked by the Spanish, who built a colonial church atop the ruins – the contrast is striking.

Fill your belly at Greens café, then it's over to the Museum of Pre-Columbian Art, a museum-lovers favorite that stretches across two floors of a Spanish-Colonial *casona*.

Next, stop in at the Centro de Textiles Tradicionales. This nonprofit organization is preserving traditional weaving techniques and helping local communities in the process.

Dining and nightlife in Cusco

For dinner, it's Morena's for incredible, well-priced Peruvian food, or try Papacho's, the only gourmet burger joint in Cusco, by famed Peruvian chef Gaston Acurio.

Then it's time to party, and Cusco is rife with options. Pepe Zeta is a no-frills hangout serving liter beers and Andean music, or try Mama Africa, the pop-reggaeton club that's the spot for young travelers. For laid-back vibes, hit Los Perros, a cafe that turns jazz lounge at night.

Sacred Valley day trip

The next morning, head out early to see the Sacred Valley. Your *Boleto Turistico* will get you into the Moray agricultural amphitheater and the Pisac and Ollantaytambo archaeological sites

Back in Cusco, grab a healthy bite at Organika. Then it's off to the ChocoMuseo for a chocolate-making lesson, followed by a yoga class at Healing House to unwind before your trek to Machu Picchu or one of the other epic treks in the region.

What to Buy

Nothing's more Peruvian than a brightly colored bag, sweater, hat, or table runner woven in a traditional Andean pattern. Look for textiles made from alpaca wool (a relative of the llama) – it's hypo-allergenic, naturally water-resistant, and sustainable. "Baby" alpaca comes from the first shearing of the alpaca and is particularly fine and soft. To see if your textile is alpaca and not acrylic, hold it in the sunlight – if it glints, it's at least partially acrylic. Also, if the price seems too good to be true, it probably is.

Day Trips from Cusco

Looming fortresses, blinding white salt mines, and plenty of hiking trails make a day trip to the Sacred Valley the perfect introduction to all things Inca.

While Machu Picchu is the primary reason for making a pilgrimage to Cusco, it would be a mistake to skip the Sacred Valley. Squashed between the city and the citadel, it's a region of hilltop ruins and dramatic agricultural terraces, where ancient customs are still very much alive.

The elevation here is high, but then so are the rewards; these day trips into the Sacred Valley will prepare you physically and culturally for traveling onwards to Machu Picchu.

Tambomachay and Sacsayhuaman

Situated only 5mi (8km) away from Cusco, Tambomachay is an easy independent day trip and excellent for acclimatizing. These ceremonial baths – most likely used by Inca nobility – sit at 12,467ft (3,800m) elevation, so boarding a cheap *collectivo* (shared minivan) destined for Pisac from Calle Puputi, getting off at Tambomachay, then hiking back down via Sacsayhuaman is far more pleasant than walking both ways.

From the ruins, take the main road and then the path bearing left. As it meanders down towards Cusco, you'll



Sacsayhuaman

pass a clutch of archaeological sites, including the man-made caves of Q'enqo, the site of Inca ritual sacrifice, before the formidable dry-stone walls of the great fortress Sacsayhuaman rise up before you.

It's said that Cusco, former capital of the Inca empire, was originally built in the shape of a puma – the fortress is its head, and the terraced walls form the cat's teeth.

But the real gem of your adventure is the Cusco Planetarium. Astronomy was essential to Incan life, and this family-owned planetarium will teach you all you need to know, complete with stunning views of the stars.

A gentle 20-minute hike then takes you back down into Cusco.

Market bartering in Pisac

Rising out of the hillside above the village of Pisac, the Inca Písac citadel

“
The elevation here is high, but then so are the rewards; these day trips into the Sacred Valley will prepare you physically and culturally for traveling onwards to Machu Picchu.”

THE HIGHLANDS

is relatively unvisited compared with many other Sacred Valley treasures. It's made up of agricultural terraces, an Inca cemetery, and a temple complex, with vast, valley-length views to boot, but unless you're superbly fit and acclimatized (it's a gruelling 90-minute hike up), hire a taxi to the top and wander down through the ruins.

Back in Pisac, savor the chaos of its market, with Sundays hitting full throttle as the stalls burst with alpaca sweaters, pyramids of colorful powdered dyes, and elaborately painted Andean pottery. Don't forget to barter, it's all part of the fun.

The Moray Terraces and Salinas de Maras

Ditch the expensive bus tours for the Moray Terraces and Salinas de Maras and instead hop on a *collectivo* (this time from Calle Pavitos for S/.10 or US \$3) to be dropped off at the turning for Moray.

From here, a short taxi ride brings you to the Inca's agricultural laboratory. Spiraling up the hillside, these circular terraces differ 59°F (15°C) in temperature between the highest and the lowest, creating unique microclimates that allowed the Incas to experiment with growing crops.

A 5.6mi (9km) hike back via the village of Moray brings you to the equally spectacular Salinas de Maras, a shimmering landscape of salt pools etched into the hillside. Local families have been extracting the white stuff here for millennia – it's back-breaking



Ellen Hall

“
The sweeping perspective of the gorge from the top makes the strategic placement of this fortress clear.

Know your camelids

At some point in the highlands, you'll likely run across a llama (perhaps with ears trimmed in bright tassels) or a herd of alpaca. But what's the difference? Both are South American camelids, but llamas are bigger and used primarily as pack animals, while alpacas are raised for their wool and their meat. The other New World camelids are the delicate vicuña (which has extremely fine wool used in very expensive textiles) and the guanaco, a smaller version of the llama found in the deserts of southern Peru. Both are wild.

work, so make sure you buy salt from the shop before taking the path on the left of the pools down into the Sacred Valley and a bus back to Cusco.

Inca ruins in Ollantaytambo

The small-yet-perfectly-formed town of Ollantaytambo has more to offer than just the train to Aguas Calientes.

Give yourself a few hours here and climb the stone steps up Temple Hill, the ruins perched above the village. The sweeping perspective of the gorge from the top makes the strategic placement of this fortress clear.

On the road back to Cusco, hop on any *collectivo* and get off at Cerveceria del Valle, a nearby craft brewery, whose six beers on tap and seasonal menu of pub grub is an excellent reward for an afternoon's hiking.

Making the Most of Machu Picchu

The iconic “lost city” of Machu Picchu is deservedly famous – and insanely popular. Here’s how to avoid the crowds and experience it at its best.

This Wonder of the World is open daily from 6am to 4pm, and even though visitors are capped at 2,500, there are always crowds. Except if you’re one of the first to enter.

This isn’t an easy feat. First, you’ll need your ticket in hand, bought in advance online or as part of your trekking package – you can’t get them at the entrance. Be aware that new rules have been put in place in an attempt to minimize the impact of tourism on the site. Visitors are now allowed entry in two half-day shifts, so be sure to purchase your ticket for the morning if you plan to go early.

Beginning in 2018, it may be mandatory to visit the ruins with a licensed guide. This can be arranged through a tour company or at the entrance (though you might get a higher-quality guide through the tour company).

The gateway to Machu Picchu is the town of Aguas Calientes. You can get here by trek or train – both are incredible.



Machu Picchu at Sunrise

Hiking to Machu Picchu

This is without doubt a bucket-list experience. You’ll visit crystalline glacial lakes and see the majestic Andes mountains in all their splendor – it’s a very special journey, and all treks are worth it.

The classic Inca trail has a 500-person-per-day limit (guided tours only) that books out months in advance. However, it’s the only one that ends at Inti Punku (Sun Gate), the historic entry point to Machu Picchu. If you get up early enough on the last day of the hike, you can be at this gate by sunrise.

A cheaper alternative is the Salkantay trail. Its scenery is equally spectacular, but there are no permit limitations – experienced hikers can even go without guides as long as they’re prepped for the sub-zero nights.

“The classic Inca trail has a 500-person-per-day limit that books out months in advance, but is the only one that ends at Inti Punku (Sun Gate).”

THE HIGHLANDS

Getting to Machu Picchu by train

Other than hiking, the only other way to get to Machu Picchu is by rail – there are no roads to the ruins. Trains depart from Poroy (about a 20-minute taxi ride from Cusco) or Ollantaytambo in the Sacred Valley.

The economically-priced Vistadome and Expedition trains have panoramic windows and skylights to enjoy the beautiful landscapes on your three-hour journey, or take the Belmond Hiram Bingham for a true luxury experience.

Going by train lets you avoid an overnight stay in Aguas Calientes, but that's not recommended if you want to see Machu Picchu with no crowds.

Beating the crowds

So how to get in first? There's a Belmond hotel just outside the ruin, and if you have the means to stay there you can guarantee first entry. If you don't, don't sweat it. Just be up at 4am so you're first in line for the bus to the site's gates. For the mega-fit, consider an extended morning sprint up the steep hill to the entrance. There are always a few runners who beat even the first bus up.

Hiking at the ruins: Huayna Picchu vs. Machu Picchu Mountain

There's a good chance you've heard about Huayna Picchu ("young mountain"), the famous, cone-shaped hill behind the ruins. It can be climbed in two to three hours. There are a



handful of ruins on Huayna Picchu, most notably the Temple of the Moon, accessed by the Gran Caverna path.

Less well-known, but also a worthwhile climb, is Machu Picchu Mountain, southwest of the Machu Picchu citadel across from Huayna Picchu. It can be climbed in three to four hours.

If you want to do one of these hikes, make sure you've pre-purchased a ticket to Machu Picchu Mountain or Huayna Picchu as part of your entry ticket. There are limits to the number of people who are allowed to do the treks each day.

You'll need to start the treks early in the day (before 8am or 11am for Huayna Picchu, depending on your ticket, and before 10am for Machu Picchu Mountain). Both offer impressive views of Machu Picchu and the valley, but both are intense climbs. Which one to choose is personal: Huayna Picchu is better known and thus more crowded, but it's a "shorter" climb. Machu Picchu Mountain has better views (it's higher up) and fewer crowds, but no ruins and is a longer trek.

“Less well-known, but also a worthwhile climb, is Machu Picchu Mountain, southwest of the Machu Picchu citadel across from Huayna Picchu.”

Alternatives to the Inca Trail

With permits limited on Peru's iconic, well-trodden Inca Trail, alternative routes to the treasures of the Andes are ever more appealing.

Peru's iconic Inca Trail, a fairly taxing 26-mi (42km) hike to the sacred Inca city of Machu Picchu, has been an adventure lover's rite of passage since the site was first discovered in 1911. As over a million travelers descend each year and the site nudges ever closer to inclusion on UNESCO's list of endangered Heritage Sites, more sustainable tourist initiatives have taken hold.

These equally scenic Andean routes offer trails strewn with Inca ruins amidst a diversity of ecosystems, unsullied by the selfie stick-wielding crowds.

Practical Tips for Hiking to Machu Picchu

Besides the alternative routes to Machu Picchu listed here, many operators will customize their standard routes and offer treks that range from basic tents to more "glamping" style options.

Travelers who like peace of mind should book in advance, although you can often save significantly by booking on the ground in Cusco.

In very high season (June to September), tours quickly sell out. You'll also need to purchase your permits for



Hiking the Salkantay Trail

Machu Picchu at least three months in advance.

To avoid altitude sickness, plan to spend two or three days acclimatizing in Cusco before setting out. High elevations can also mean dramatic temperature spikes.

Salkantay Trek to Machu Picchu

The five-day Salkantay Trail is the most popular alternative to the classic Inca Trail. The trail starts at Mollepata, three hours from Cusco, and negotiates 45mi (72.5km) of soaring Andean peaks, cloud forest, and lowland jungle.

Widely considered to be a step up from the Inca Trail in terms of physical challenge, hikers must tackle the windswept, frigid Salkantay Pass (14,760ft or 4,500m).

The trade-off is huge: the chance to hike in relative solitude past awe-

“
These equally scenic Andean routes offer trails strewn with Inca ruins amidst a flamboyant diversity of ecosystems.”

THE HIGHLANDS



inspiring Salkantay Mountain and through valleys studded with ruins. The tour costs around S/. 1,779 or US \$550 (based on nine trekkers). There's also the option of staying in high-end mountain lodges (from S/. 10,350 or US \$3,200).

No permits or guides are required for this trek, but you'll still need to purchase an entrance ticket to Machu Picchu (around S/. 226 or US \$70). Independent hikers can arrange tickets in advance through the official Peruvian Ministry of Culture website

Ancascocha Trail to Machu Picchu

Located within the Sacred Valley, this trek offers similar scenery to the Inca Trail, but with little tourist traffic and the chance to explore recently excavated ruins en route.

Much more strenuous than the Inca Trail, this 34mi (55km) trail involves ascending seven steep summits and negotiating rocky terrain at 15,800ft (4,816m). Your reward: a secluded hike through the pristine Vilcabamba and Urubamba mountain ranges.

On the final day, trekkers board

the train to Aguas Calientes, the base camp for Machu Picchu. Tours begin in Cusco and drive to the starting point at Mollepata. Prices for the tour range from S/. 3,073 or US \$950 (six to ten trekkers) to S/. 3,720 or US \$1,150 (two trekkers).

Classic Choquequirao trail

Nestled in cloud forest, some 61mi (98km) west of Cusco, the magnificent Inca citadel of Choquequirao is often called the "other Machu Picchu." With a maximum elevation of 10,000ft (3,048m), this trek is not a high-altitude head spinner compared to some others. But it does feature some brutal ascents, rugged terrain, and a challenging hike deep into the Apurímac Canyon.

Your payoff is gorgeous scenery and newly discovered ruins – all without the need for a guide and the crowds of Machu Picchu.

Departing from Cachora (four hours from Cusco), the four-day round trip with a guide costs around S./ 1,860 or US \$575 per person (nine to twelve trekkers) to S/. 4,237 or US \$1,310 (two trekkers).

For an epic nine-day adventure, many tour operators offer a Choquequirao hike that links up with the Inca Trail (58mi or 93km total). Beyond Choquequirao, the trail traverses the remote Vilcabamba mountain range before reaching Urubamba, where trekkers board the train to Aguas Calientes, the base camp for Machu Picchu.

Expect to pay from S/. 4,480 or US \$1,385 (nine trekkers) to S/. 7,957 or US \$2,640 (two trekkers).

“**Much more strenuous than the Inca Trail, this 34mi (55km) trail involves ascending seven steep summits and negotiating rocky terrain at a dizzying 15,800ft (4,816m).**”

The Cordilleras

Peru's Cordilleras offer up towering peaks, turquoise lagoons, ancient temples, and about a million other adventures in between.

You could easily spend a month here and not get bored, but with five to ten days you can take on a trek, have a great night out with a hodge-podge of international travelers in Huaraz, and visit most of the top sites.

Huaraz

The nexus and plexus of the region, Huaraz is the staging ground for most of your adventures here. A dozen-plus outfitters will get you ready for treks, mountain bike trips, climbing adventures, and horseback riding.

Many people choose to stay in Huaraz and take day tours out to places like Chavín de Huántar, the Lagunas Llaganuco, the Laguna Parón, or the glacier at Nevado Pastorurí.



Huaraz



Huaraz City

Right in town, head up on a quick 45-minute hike to Mirador de Reaqueña to acclimatize yourself and savor the views of the surrounding wilderness. Huaraz is at 10,141ft (3,091m), and you'll want to take your time for the first day or so.

The stalls at the *Feria Artesanal* (Artisans Market) are great for picking up souvenirs and thick wool sweaters for the cold nights. If you're interested in giving back, there are a number of local non-profits that take on both short- and long-term volunteers.

Come night-time, a fun-loving crowd of international travelers, locals, scruffy mountaineers, and other interesting characters come together in the raucous beer halls that light up the Andean night.

Cordillera Blanca

There are plenty of adventures to

“

Huaraz is at 10,141ft (3,091m), and you'll want to take your time for the first day or so.

THE HIGHLANDS


Trekking in the Cordillera Blanca

be had in the Cordillera Blanca, from bagging a 19,685ft (6,000m) peak – no small endeavor – to heading off the beaten track to the less-visited lagoons that mark this high Andean mountain range.

The top trek for most is the three- or four-day Santa Cruz Trek. Outfitters in Huaraz can get you started, and you can do the trip with a guide or on your own. It's fairly well traveled and signposted, so navigation is a breeze. Prepare for huge Andean vistas, mountain-top climbs, casual encounters with Quechua-speaking locals, and a peaceful escape under the big Peruvian sky.

The Casa de Guías in Huaraz is a good place to pick up a guide and hire pack animals if you're interested. Guided treks will cost S/. 486-972 (US \$150-300).

Chavín de Huántar and the Callejón de Conchucos

The Callejón de Conchucos, a glorious collection of valleys on the eastern slopes of the Cordillera Blanca, is another trekking, mountain biking, and exploring highlight. If you only have a day, be sure to make it out to Chavín de

Huántar to explore the underground passageways, ceremonial temples, and onsite museum at this World Heritage site that saw its rise between 1200 and 500 BC. Most people come here on a day trip from Huaraz. You can stop along the way in small Quechua-speaking villages, taking quick hikes out to lost lagoons.

Chiquián and the Cordillera Huayhuash

It's less famous than the Cordillera Blanca, but nevertheless, the virgin, remote, and stunning Cordillera Huayhuash offers a bunch of challenging high-altitude treks. If you have the time – and the stamina – the spectacular, nine-day Cordillera Huayhuash Circuit starts in Pocpa and ends in Llamac, and includes visits to tiny Andean hamlets and turquoise lakes.

Many people kick off the trip in the laid-back village of Chiquián. Expect to pay about S/. 162 (US \$50) per day for a guide and S/. 65 (US \$20) for a donkey – believe us, it's worth it to not have the extra weight on your back, especially on the ascents to mountain passes over 16,400ft (5,000m).

“

Prepare for huge Andean vistas, mountain-top climbs, casual encounters with Quechua-speaking locals, and a peaceful escape under the big Peruvian sky.

What's a Cordillera?

A *cordillera* is a chain of mountains (the name means “little rope” in Spanish). The term is used mostly for ranges in the Americas, particularly the Andes.

Peru's astounding Cordillera Blanca is the world's second-highest mountain range after the Himalayas, and the highest tropical mountain range. It features more than 25 peaks over 19,685ft (6,000m), most notably colossal Huascarán, Peru's tallest peak at 22,205ft (6,768m).

Not to be outdone, the Cordillera Huayhuash has its own claim to fame – it's home to Laguna Niñococha, the glacial lake that's the source of the mighty Amazon River.

The Central Sierra

Under the monumental peaks of the Andes, a traditional way of living still predominates.

In Peru's Central Sierra region, sites are linked up by the Incan Andean Road and divided by contrasts of vividness and modesty, city bustle and mountain serenity, rich vegetation and austere plains.

Ayacucho

This city is the best starting point for exploring the Central Sierra. A wide choice of bus companies operate between Lima and Ayacucho, so decide which comfort level suits you for an eight-hour journey, climbing from sea level to 8,860ft (2,700m), or you can pick one of four flights.

Despite its gloomy name – it was dubbed “corner of the dead” after a bloody battle in 1825 – Ayacucho is a very lively city with an engaging blend of indigenous and Catholic beliefs.

It's most famous for its 33 churches, starting with Catedral Basilica de Santa María at the Plaza de Armas. Be sure to stop at this square on Sunday to try the delicious local ice cream known as *muyuchi*.

Also highly recommended is Museo de la Memoria (S/. 2 or US \$.60 for the guided tour), which vividly illustrates the atrocity of the Shining Path guerrillas.

Don't miss the Santa Ana artisan



Ayacucho

district, where traditional *retablos* (devotional story boxes) are made. For great views over the whole city, hike up to Cerro Acuchimay or Cerro Picota.

Festivals in Ayacucho

Ayacuchan locals love to celebrate. Many fiestas are held during the year, beginning with *Carnaval Ayacuchano* in February/March, when the whole city dances and shows its ceremonial face.

But few Peruvian festivities can compare with *Ayacuchan Semana Santa* (Holy Week). Every visitor can take part in observing the creation of floral carpets, weeping over Christ's coffin, finding cover during the bull chase, or celebrating the Easter Sunday vigil.

Quinoa

To escape the bustle of the city, take a *colectivo* (shared van or taxi) from Óvalo de Magdalena and head to

“
For great views over the whole city, hike up to Cerro Acuchimay or Cerro Picota.”

THE HIGHLANDS

the Pampa de Quinua, where the history of Peru was written. Above the Quinua village rises a mighty obelisk commemorating the victorious battle of independence in 1824. The place itself offers stunning views and invites you to hike or ride horses (S/. 10-20 or US \$3-6) towards various waterfalls.

Wari ruins

Halfway between Quinua and Ayacucho lies this extensive pre-Incan cultural site, accompanied by a small museum. Every year on the summer solstice, Familia Ancestral Kunturkanki holds the ceremony of *Inti Raymi* at this site. The scent of *palo santo*, the music, and the ceremony itself make you feel truly connected to the earth.

Huancavelica

Even higher into the mountains you'll find this picturesque colonial town. With the rising elevation, temperatures can be chilly, so the local thermal baths come in handy.

A tip for adventurers wanting an authentic local experience: take a *colectivo* from Huancavelica and give traditional living a try in Chopca village. Visitors can pitch in with the potato harvests, help prepare traditional dishes, and take part in festivities. Basic but comfortable lodging is available at Tambo. Warm clothes recommended.

Huancayo and beyond

Taking the local train Macho (S/. 13 or US \$4) is a unique way to travel from Huancavelica to Huancayo and get to

know inaccessible places. However, the train operates only from May to October.

Huancayo itself is a very pleasing town with an abundance of thematic parks like Parque de los Sombreros, where trees are replaced by hats, or Cerrito de Libertad, with an enchanting view of the city.

The quirky rock towers known as Torre Torre are only a few steps out of town, and a trek to the Huaytapallana glacier begins just 17mi (28 km) away.

Natural wonders at Tarma

Nature enthusiasts shouldn't miss the surroundings of Tarma village (alias *La Perla de los Andes*), which hide countless caves, the deepest being Gruta de Huagapo. To view a variety of wild orchids, take one of the tours to Valle de Chanchamayo.

The nearby Reserva Nacional de Junín, located within the vast Bombón plateau, features endless plains and Chinchaycocha, the largest lake within Peru and home to an abundance of birds.

Mysterious Kotosh temple

Huánuco, the so-called gateway city to the Amazon, is inseparably connected with the symbol of crossed hands, which was discovered within the religious pre-Incan site Kotosh. Although the original artifact was moved to Lima, *Templo de las Manos Cruzadas* and the whole site is worth exploring before you leave the mountains and plunge into the jungle.

“

A tip for adventurers wanting an authentic local experience: take a *colectivo* from Huancavelica and give traditional living a try in Chopca village.

Arequipa and the Canyons

The deepest canyons in the world, Colca and Cotahuasi lure extreme sport enthusiasts and trekkers, while Peru's magnificent second city, Arequipa, provides the base for exploration, along with excellent food and a perfect climate.

Arequipa

Founded in 1540, Arequipa's historic center is a confection of gleaming baroque buildings, justly anointed with UNESCO World Heritage status.

The city's undisputed cultural highlight, the Monasterio/Convento de Santa Catalina, was founded in 1579 as a holy retreat for the daughters of gilded Spanish families. Its serene courtyards, gardens, and cloisters reveal how – despite their oath to poverty and chastity – the nuns had a pretty good gig with private kitchens, art collections, servants, and luxuriously appointed “cells.”

When it comes to gastronomic flair, Arequipa gives Lima a run for its money. Calles de Santa Catalina and San Francisco are a fine place to get acquainted with Arequipeño culinary traditions. Perennial favorites are Zig Zag, with a staircase built by Gustave Eiffel, and Salamento, famed for its fresh takes on classic Peruvian dishes.



Cruz del Condor lookout

“When it comes to gastronomic flair, Arequipa gives Lima a run for its money.”

Colca Canyon

The Cañón del Colca defies superlatives. Plunging to 11,150ft (3,399m) – that's twice as deep as the Grand Canyon – Colca Canyon forms part of a 62mi-long (100km-long) volcanic mountain range dominated by awe-inspiring Mount Coropuna. Adventure travelers test their mettle with multi-day hiking trips and mountaineering expeditions that venture deep into the canyon.

There's also excellent river rafting, mountain biking, and a zip line which plummets 1,640ft (500m) between the canyon walls in a simulation of the flight of an Andean Condor.

The actual flight of these impressively large birds can be viewed at the Cruz del Cóndor lookout – most tour group itineraries include a stop.

Cotahuasi Canyon

The crown for “deepest canyon in

THE HIGHLANDS

the world” goes to Cahatuasi. It’s the preserve of experienced hikers, climbers, and river rafters due to its inaccessibility and intense Class V rapids.

If you’re planning to hit Cahatuasi, it’s worth a short detour to the town of Corire and the Toro Myerto petroglyphs, a series of ancient cave paintings.

Most travelers to Cahatuasi sign up for organized excursions from Arequipa to Chivay, the canyon’s main village. There’s no need to plan ahead – Arequipa’s bevy of outfitters offer daily departures ranging from day trips to multi-day treks.

Colectivos (mini vans) shuttle independent travelers from Arequipa to the canyon’s villages, where experienced hikers can go it alone without a guide. Note that to enter the canyon all visitors must purchase a *Boleto Turistico*, or Tourist Ticket, for S/. 91 (US \$28).

Chivay and canyon villages

The Colca Valley’s villages unfurl along the south and north banks of the canyon. Most tourist traffic is centered on the dusty town of Chivay, which clings to its Quechua traditions while thoroughly embracing its status as the canyon’s main hub.

With electricity still a recent addition, Chivay has a low-key vibe with a growing kernel of locally run hotels, inns, and restaurants. Town life orbits around the market and main square, where colorfully attired Colca women ply their wares against a backdrop of snowcapped peaks and terraced hillsides.

If you’re looking for more comfortable accommodation, it’s



Plaza de Armas, Chivay

“**Colectivos (mini vans) shuttle independent travelers from Arequipa to the canyon’s villages, where experienced hikers can go it alone without a guide.**

worth shelling out for a room at the rustic-chic lodges located between Chivay and Cabanaconde.

Paucarpata and Sabandia

4mi (6.4km) southeast of Arequipa, the town of Paucarpata is a worthwhile foray into the countryside. Founded by the Spanish in the late 16th century, its rich cultural traditions and pre-Inca terraces can be explored on a combined day trip with Sabandia (another mile down the road).

In Sabandia, renowned architect Luis Felipe Calle breathed new life into the region’s first stone mill, or *molina*, built in the early 17th century. When the restoration project wrapped up in 1973, the architect was so taken with his accomplishment that he bought the mill and turned it into a tourist attraction complete with informative tours (S/. 9.70 or US \$3), a swimming pool, and horseback rides.

You can take a taxi (S./ 32 or around US \$10 return trip) or *colectivo* (S/. 1.6 or US \$0.50 each way) to Paucarpata and then Sabandia from Arequipa, or just walk (around two hours).

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Lake Titicaca

Spanning the borders of Peru and Bolivia, Lake Titicaca is the world's highest navigable lake at 12,507ft (3,812m). The region is famous for its islands and crystal-clear waters as well as its festivals and archaeological sites.

Uros

The floating Uros islands are one of the main reasons tourists flock to Lake Titicaca. These islands are made from *titora* (a type of reed) and are about an hour's boat ride from Puno. They were originally built by the Uros people, although most of the remaining members left in the 1950s. Nowadays locals of Aymara origin run the islands and maintain the old traditions, making their boats and even their homes from the reeds and creating brightly colored handicrafts.

Despite an obvious lack of authenticity, the Uros islands are a completely unique spot in the world, where you can immerse yourself in the daily lives of an incredible and



Ellen Hall

Handicrafts on the Uros islands



Lake Titicaca from Taquile Island

almost extinct society in an amazingly picturesque landscape. The trip is three hours long (one hour on-site) and costs S/. 40-50 (US \$12-15.50).

Amantani

Three hours by boat from Uros on the other side of the Capachica peninsula is Amantani island, where visitors can get a breathtaking view of the snowy Bolivian mountain peaks.

With the vivid blue of the lake, the island's stony ground, and the rural look of some of the houses, the town has the feeling of a small village along the Mediterranean coast. It's a completely timeless, stress-free place where there's not much to do but contemplate the landscape and countless quinoa fields – and a few solar panels!

To get here, it's advisable to book a two-day, one-night trip with an

“
These islands are made from *titora* (a type of reed) and are about an hour's boat ride from Puno.”

THE HIGHLANDS

overnight homestay on Amantani. This tour includes Uros and Taquile. Prices from S/. 120 (US \$37).

Taquile

Three hours from Puno and one hour away from Amantani, the island of Taquile is equally impressive. The road from the port to the center of the village takes your breath away (in every sense of the word, for people who are not used to physical effort at altitude).

Known for its artisanal cloth – the women do the weaving, the men do the knitting – Taquile is generally a bit livelier than the other islands. Taquileans are also famous for distinguishing their relationship status through their dress (the color and placement of hats, skirts, and tassels all have their meaning) and for promoting living together before marriage. You can visit Taquile in one day, with a stop halfway in Uros, for S/. 80 (US \$24.75).

Sillustani

This enigmatic pre-Inca archaeological site is on the shores of striking Umayo Lagoon, only 45 minutes from Puno. It's known for its cylindrical funerary towers called *chullpas*, built by the ancient Colla people as burying places for their nobility. The finest of the *chullpas* were constructed without mortar and taper outwards from the base, like a funnel – an unusual building style.

The simplest way of getting here is with a tour operator (S/. 40-60 or US



Houses on Taquile Island

\$12-18.50), but there's also the option of boarding a *colectivo* going from Puno to Jaliaca (S/. 3 or US \$1) and asking to be let off at the crossroads for Sillustani. From here, you must take a second *colectivo* (S/. 3) then pay the S/. 10 (US \$3) entrance fee for the Sillustani site.

Festivals in Puno

Exploring Lake Titicaca isn't just about touring the islands – Puno is known for being one of the most vibrant towns of Peru. Almost every month, a festival or other celebration takes over the streets.

Puno Week in early November recreates the city's mythical creation, when Manco Capac and Mama Ocllo, son and daughter of the Sun God, rose from the lake to found the Inca Empire. But the biggest of them all is the *Virgen de la Candelaria*, a Catholic festival which has been given Intangible Cultural Heritage status by UNESCO. Held in early February, this event includes the energetic *diablada puneña*, with dancers extravagantly costumed as angels, demons, and a sacred condor.

Avoiding Sunburn and Heat Exhaustion

Peru is situated near the equator, which means the effect of the sun is much stronger than you would experience in latitudes further south or north.

Wherever you go in Peru, be sure to protect yourself from sunburn, or worse, heat exhaustion or heat stroke. This is particularly important at high elevations, because there's less of the earth's atmosphere to block the sunlight.

Always wear a hat and sunglasses, apply broad spectrum sunscreen (SPF 30+ or higher), and wear light, long-sleeved clothing – even on overcast days.



THE AMAZON

The Amazon rainforest acts as the lungs of the planet, soaking up carbon dioxide and pumping out sweet oxygen. The Peruvian Amazon is astonishing in its biodiversity – it's home to over 14,500 species of animals, making it a must-visit for lovers of wildlife.



Exploring the Selva

Covering more than half of Peru, the Peruvian Amazon can be roughly divided into three different areas; the southern, central, and northern selva (jungle).

Madre de Dios and the southern selva

Puerto Maldonado, the capital of the Madre de Dios region, can be accessed by air and road from Cusco. Most visitors come to this remote but bustling frontier town just to enter the jungle.

In the Reserva Nacional Tambopata, you can visit incredibly biodiverse rainforest, easily reachable from many of the lodges around Puerto Maldonado. Don't miss the macaw clay licks, which attract huge numbers of these colorful parrots and other animals, and the hike to Sandoval Lake.

Also within easy reach of Puerto Maldonado are several indigenous



Macaws at clay lick, Madre de Dios

tribes living in relative isolation. Some jungle tours will include a brief visit to one of their villages.

Manu National Park

This UNESCO-certified park in the Madre de Dios region is one of South America's best locations to observe tropical wildlife.

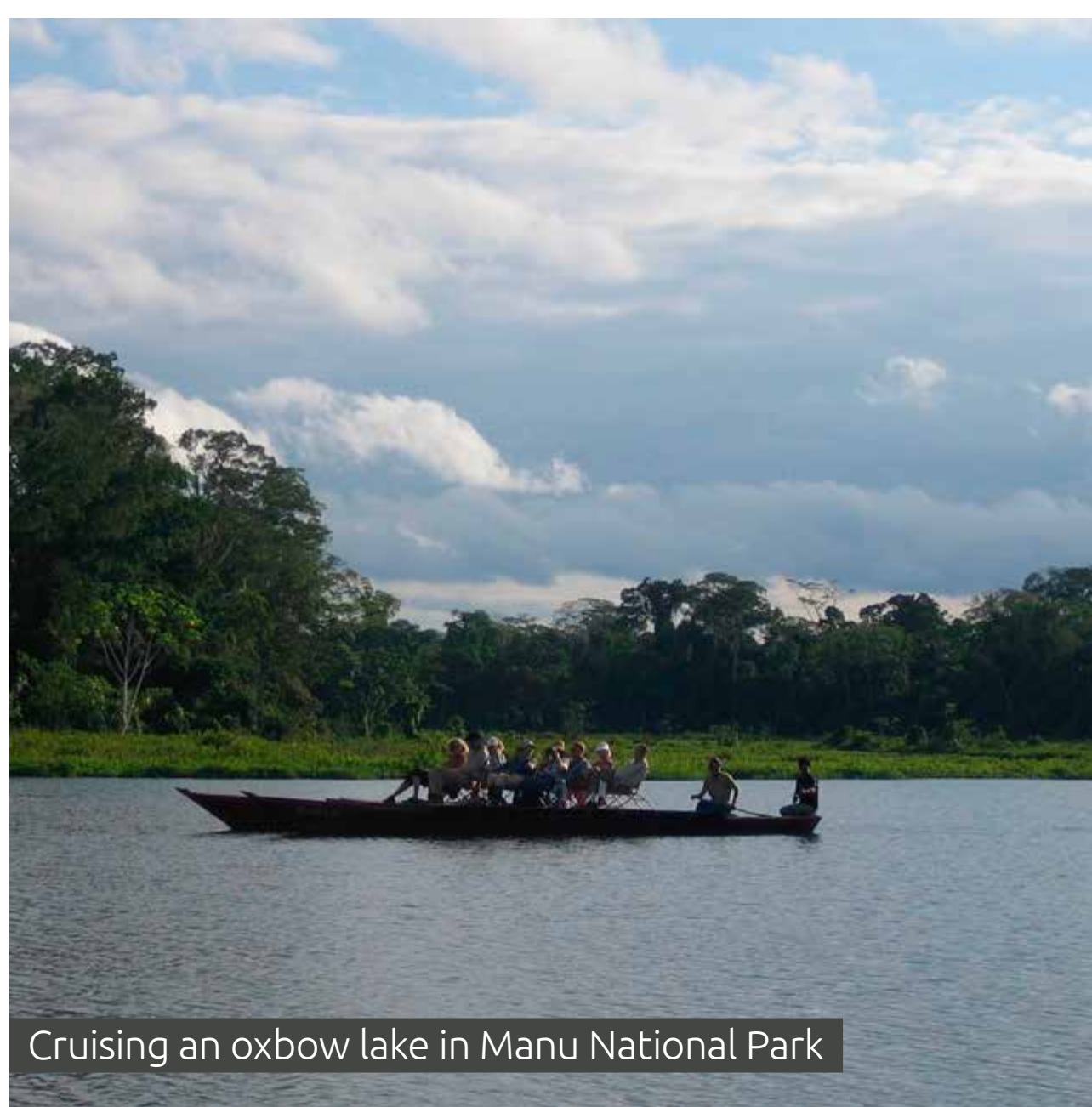
The park covers an area of almost 7,722 mi² (20,000 km²), and has some of the greatest biodiversity on the planet, with a dizzying array of bird and animal life. Trips to the reserved zone are more expensive, but offer a much better chance of seeing wildlife.

Cheaper tours are available in the "cultural zone," which still have good wildlife watching and are ideal for budget travelers. Costs vary, but range from S/. 320-965 (US \$100-300) per day, for itineraries from four to nine days.

Responsible tourism

Tourist initiatives are one of the best ways of protecting the rainforest and creating jobs for local people. Provided you choose a reputable operator, you are helping to protect the Amazon by visiting on a wildlife-watching tour.

Please show respect to indigenous people and their way of life, ask before taking photos, do not hand out sweets (as there is no dental care here) and be kind at all times – a smile goes a long way towards defusing most situations.



Cruising an oxbow lake in Manu National Park



Floating village of Belen

The Chanchamayo Valley

This the closest jungle area to Lima, and marks the beginning of the Central Selva. The region has good road links, and plenty of protected areas for birdwatching.

The town of La Merced has a thriving Saturday market – buying the colorful handicrafts here is a great way to support the locals.

The nearby town of Satipo has a daily market, although it's better on the weekends. Most backpackers start their jungle expeditions from either La Merced or Satipo.

Pozuzo

Further north, Pozuzo is a bizarre mix of Austrian, German, and Peruvian culture, following an agreement between Germany and Peru to establish German settlements in the rainforest in the mid-19th century. Wooden chalets, German

Safety tips

To enjoy the Amazon in comfort, we strongly recommend that you pack a mosquito net, bug spray, and patience – getting around takes time. It's also crucial to bring a decent head lamp. In the darkness of the Amazon, this can at most save your life and, at the least, help you find your way to the toilet!

speakers, and even lederhosen (on special occasions) are not what you might expect in the Amazon!

The northern selva

This is the only area in Peru where it's possible to visit the actual Amazon river and not a tributary, meaning there's wildlife here which isn't found elsewhere, like the rare pink river dolphin.

In the region you can also visit indigenous villages such as the Yagua tribe or take a trip to the renowned Tapiche reserve, around ten hours from Iquitos.

Iquitos

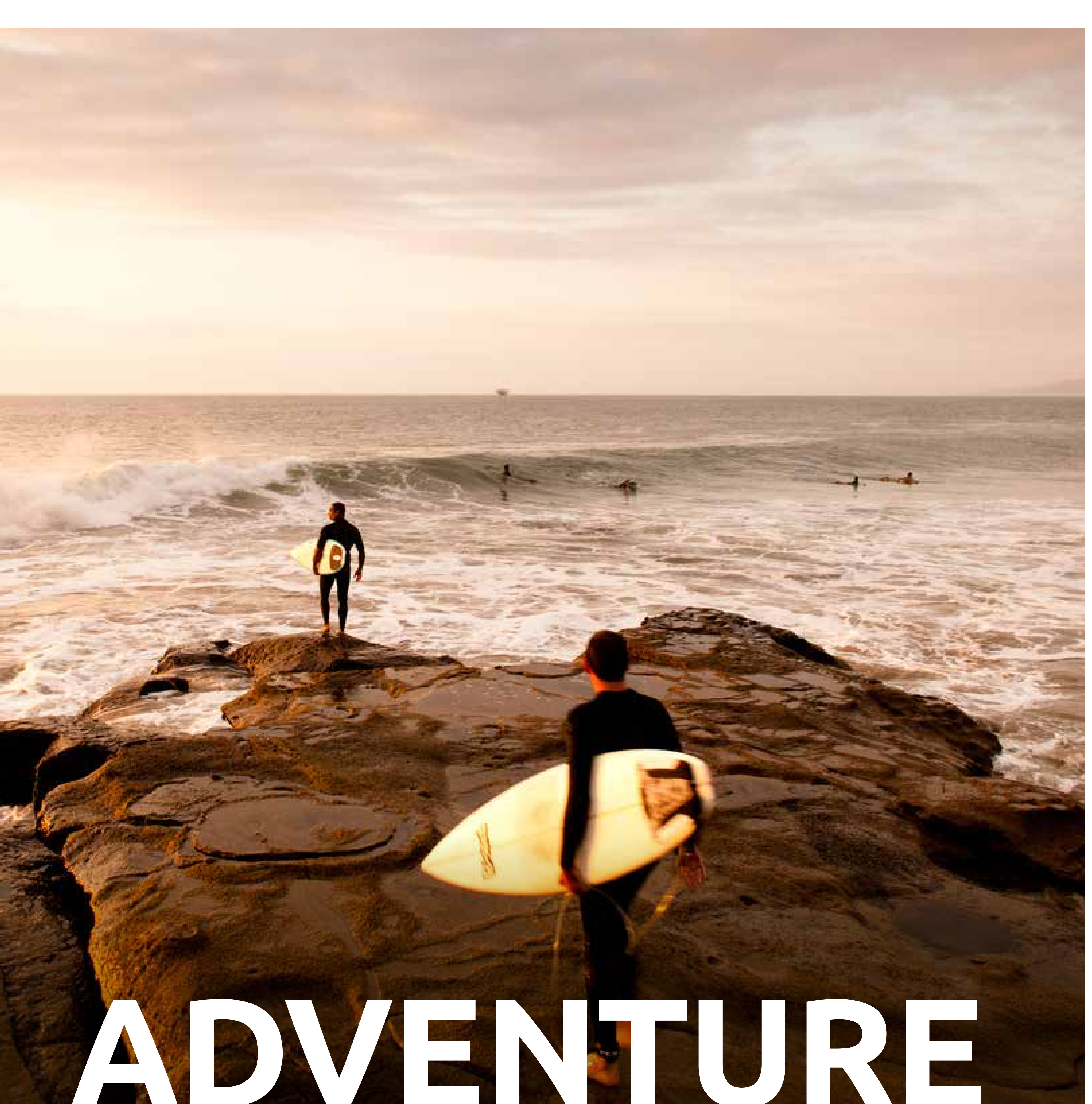
The main access point to the northern selva, Iquitos is the largest city in the world that cannot be reached by road – it's accessible only by air or slow boat.

The boat journey from Pucallpa takes three to five days. Bring a camping hammock with a mosquito net or consider a cabin if you're traveling alone to keep your belongings safe. Just be sure to bring a lock.

Iquitos is worth spending a couple of days in before you head on a jungle tour. Check out the fascinating market in the floating shanty town of Belen.

Reserva Nacional Pacaya-Samiria

This is Peru's largest reserve. Most people visit here on a tour from Iquitos, but you can travel to Lagunas independently and arrange a guide there for a more DIY adventure, although costs are still high – at least S/. 240 (US \$75) per day excluding accommodation.



With sky-high mountain trails to conquer, thundering rivers to navigate, and some of the world's best surfing, Peru has everything to satisfy the thrill-seeker in you.

Hiking and Trekking

In the mood for a day hike through misty cloud forest to a towering waterfall? Or maybe you're keen for a multi-day expedition in the sacred Andes? Whatever you're up for, Peru has you covered.

Gocta Falls

Flights from Lima to Jaen City get you into the land of the cloud forests, and then a three-hour drive to Cocachimba will see you at the base of your trek. Here you can hire a guide and horses to make your way down to the floor of this impressive two-tiered waterfall (2,531ft or 771m high). There's an alternate route from the village of San Pablo to the upper section of the fall.

The hike takes just over two hours each way through lush, old-growth forest filled with colorful birds, butterflies, and hidden orchids – the falls provide a stunning backdrop for enjoying a packed lunch. There are some steep sections, and switchbacks and mud can make parts of the trails slippery. But this is an enjoyable hike for people of most fitness levels, and with horses to handle the toughest parts it's accessible to a range of walkers. Keep your eyes peeled for the bright-red cock-of-the-rock, the national bird of Peru.

Best time to go: During the rainy season November to April, the falls will be at their most impressive, but this



might make the trek a little tougher to navigate.

Yumbilla Falls

There's an even taller waterfall to check out in the area, located in the village of Cuispes, 15 minutes outside of Pedro Ruiz. The falls are 2,936ft (895m) high, with spectacular views on the hike there. In this primary forest, you'll also pass the waterfalls of Medio Cerro and Cristal before reaching the mighty Yumbilla.

Adventurous travelers can try canyoning here, rappelling down the side of one of the smaller waterfalls. This is an exhilarating activity, but be sure to hire an experienced guide with quality equipment and safety protocols.

When to go: Again, the rainy season means more dramatic waterfalls, but it can make more adventurous hikes unwise.

“**Adventurous travelers can try canyoning here, rappelling down the side of one of the smaller waterfalls.**”



Ausangate

Ausangate

Also known as the “colorful mountain”, this stunning range can appear striped with reds, yellows, and even turquoise. The trek here is one of the most scenic, challenging, and highest-altitude hikes in Peru.

Tour companies offer treks ranging from three to seven days, but the most spectacular involve, at minimum, a five-day circuit from a starting altitude of 12,464ft (3,800m). From there, the trail ascends to over 17,060ft (5,200m) and negotiates three hair-raisingly high passes.

Unlike the Inca Trail, no permits or guides are needed, and you’ll likely meet only a smattering of other hikers as you traverse glacier-capped peaks, high alpine lakes, and valleys full of alpacas and llamas.

As well as basic campsites, trekkers can sleep at one of four upscale lodges (*tambos*) or in basic huts. This is also

one of the few trails that allow horses. Most tours start in Cusco and drive southeast to Tinki. Prices range from S/. 1,682 or US \$520 (nine trekkers minimum) to S/. 3,882 or US \$1200 (two trekkers).

Vinicunca (Rainbow) Mountain

The much-photographed Vinicunca (aka “Rainbow”) mountain, with its naturally striated, multi-colored hues, has been surging in popularity due to its Instagram-worthy scenery and proximity to Cusco.

It can be reached by a combined Vinicunca-Ausangate trek or on a long day trip from Cusco.

If you opt to do the standalone trek to Vinicunca, be aware that it’s a strenuous hike with a maximum elevation of 16,470ft (5,020m). Don’t attempt it unless you’ve properly acclimated beforehand.

Packing for your hike

Day hikes

Be sure to pack: good walking shoes, a rain poncho, layered clothing for changing weather conditions, sunglasses, hat and sunscreen, water bottle, snacks or lunch, insect repellent, and a camera.

Multi-day treks

For longer hikes, be sure to pack: A quality daypack with extra clothes, sunglasses and sunscreen, compass, water bottle or bladder, knife, first-aid kit, and good hiking boots. Hiking sticks are invaluable for steep climbs and descents. If you’re camping, you may also need a sleeping bag (choose one that’s lightweight but warm enough for nights at high elevation), and an inflatable mattress or sleeping mat. A flashlight or headlamp is also a must-have.

Surfing

Peru may well be the birthplace of surf – ancient artifacts show indigenous Peruvians riding waves in Huanchaco before the Polynesians were surfing *alaias* in Hawaii.

Peru draws wave worshippers from around the world to its 1,500mi (2,414km) coastline, and there are waves for all levels along its shores. The best swells hit October to March, and except for up north, it's wetsuit water. Here are some of the country's top surfing destinations.

The Central North

Chicama, also known as Puerto Malabrigo, is home to the world's longest rideable left-hander. If it's connecting, you can literally surf this cold-water break for more than a mile (1.6km). Just north is Huanchaco, Peru's birthplace of surfing. 2,000-year-old clay pottery depicts Peruvian fishermen riding their reed boats on Huanchaco's waves – you can still see some in action in the water.

The North Coast

The region's resident surf and party town, Mancora, is often likened to Tamarindo in Costa Rica. With easy waves, warm water, and an endless nightlife, it's easy to see why many travelers get stuck here. 45 minutes north is laid-back Zorritos, a surf-lover's paradise with natural hot springs and medicinal mud baths to boot. If you're new to the waves, lessons with Coco



Surfing off the coast of Lima

Beach surf school are a must.

South of Mancora are the real waves. Los Organos hosts endless lefts; El Ñuro too. Cabo Blanco is home to the Peruvian Pipeline – a powerful left-hand reef break whose barrels are likened to Hawaii's famous wave. Then comes Lobitos, possibly the best surf spot in Peru. Its combination of offshore winds, few crowds, and multiple peaks means there are almost always waves to be had, from heavy barrels at el Hueco and the Point to perfect lefts at Mueller, Piscinas, and Baterias.

Lima and surrounds

Not to be left out is Peru's lovable capital city. Beginners can rent boards at Playa Waikiki and paddle out at Punta Roquitas by the Miraflores Boardwalk or head to La Herradura in Chorillos, a pumping left-hander that's the pride of city dwellers.

Just south of Lima is Playa Hermosa, home to quality rights at Punta Rocas and the famed Pico Alto, an experts-only wave that's one of the biggest in South America. When the swell is right, you can watch big-wave riders get towed out to 20ft (6m) monsters.

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Rafting and Kayaking

Peru offers a multitude of spectacular rafting and kayaking opportunities, whether you're new to white-water sports or are a die-hard fanatic.

The most important thing to do before you hit the water is find a reputable, experienced rafting company and guide. Check online reviews and ensure that the equipment is in good condition before you book – don't head out with someone who approached you from the shadows!

Rafting near Arequipa

The Río Chili is the most popular local river for backpackers. A half-day beginner's trip leaves daily from March to November, costing around S/. 81 (US \$25) per person.

From Arequipa, tours also head to the Río Majes, famed for its gentle Class II and III rapids. You'll get a chance to visit the petroglyphs of Toro Muerto on the way.

You can also have a homestay experience in the nearby village of Aplao and arrange white-water tours from there. It's a tad cheaper – an afternoon on the water will cost around S/. 65 (US \$20) a person.

Rafting the Cotahuasi Canyon

If you're looking for extreme adventure, a few companies offer multi-day rafting adventures on



Kayaking, Lake Titicaca

impressive Cotahuasi Canyon, the world's deepest canyon and a marvelous place of twisting rock formations and challenging Class IV and V rapids.

An adventure here is for experienced rafters only, as you'll spend ten days on the water. You can organize this from Arequipa but be warned, it will set you back around S/. 9,700 (US \$3,000). You can get this price down if you bring your haggling A-game.

Rafting near Cusco

The Río Urubamba is very popular for rafting. Day trips run every day starting from around S/. 160 (US \$50) per person. The river is relatively tame and is a good bet for beginners. Tours run all year round.

If you choose to do the Inca Jungle Trek to Machu Picchu, one day will feature white-water rafting on the Urubamba.

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An adventure here is for experienced rafters only, as you'll spend ten days on the water.”



White-water kayaking

You could also visit the Río Apurímac, famed for its challenging rapids scaling from Class III all the way up to Class V in places. The river runs through stunning scenery – deep gorges, tropical rainforest, and vibrant valleys – and you should have a good opportunity to spot some wildlife drinking from the river banks.

Tours are usually three or four days and generally only run from May to November.

Rafting in the Amazon

For a wilder trip, head to the Class IV rapids of Río Tambopata.

You need to plan this in advance as tours leave on a few set dates in July and August, or on request from March to November. The route starts in Juliaca, close to Lake Titicaca, and passes through the Tambopata Reserve in the vibrant Amazon, ending in Puerto Maldonado.

On this ten-day tour, you can see some incredible wildlife in the reserve and camp on the banks of the river,

with prices starting from around S/. 9,700 (US \$3,000) per person.

While this trip is expensive, it's well worth it for the once-in-a-lifetime experience of drifting through the Amazon and camping out amid the sounds of the forest.

Kayaking Lake Titicaca

If you're traveling in Peru, you'll almost certainly visit the legendary Lake Titicaca. It's possible to explore this incredible place by kayak, departing from Puno or Chucuito. Kayaking on the world's highest navigable lake is a special experience, but remember that the elevation will make any physical activity much harder than usual, so take it easy and do not do it hungover!

Rentals start from S/. 39 (US \$12) per hour. Tours including a visit to the floating reed islands vary from S/. 160-390 (US \$50-120).

Kayaking and rafting near Lima

Sea kayak tours are available from Lima for S/. 226 (US \$70) per person.

Lunahuaná is off the usual gringo trail, despite its location just three hours' drive from Lima, and is great for kayaking (Class I or II) and rafting (Class II to +IV). Different stretches of the Río Cañete are used depending on the season, so rafting is usually available all year, although peak season is from December to April. Rafting companies in town offer various tours for beginners and more experienced rafters, with prices ranging from S/. 49-97 (US \$15-30).

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If you're traveling in Peru, you'll almost certainly visit the legendary Lake Titicaca.

Essential Insurance Tips

If you're heading to Peru, chances are that you'll either end up hiking, surfing, or canyoning. We've created this short guide to let you know how to get cover, where cover applies, and where it doesn't.

Surfing

If you're intending to go surfing on your trip to Peru, all World Nomads' travel insurance policies (Standard or Explorer) cover surfing. This means you don't have to pay an additional premium to cover it when you're buying a policy. However, this doesn't mean that you can throw all caution to the wind. For starters, you shouldn't be exposing yourself to needless risk – for example, attempting monster waves when you've only just started learning, offshore surfing when you can barely swim, or riding in the 50-Year Storm at Bells Beach. If you do, there are exclusions in the policy, and chances are any claim that arises from those activities will be declined.

It's a good idea to look at the limits in each policy so you know how you're covered, not only for medical costs and evacuation (in case you get so badly banged up we need to bring you home), but also for cancellation expenses, baggage, and all of the other applicable benefits. Medical evacuation is expensive no matter where you are in the world, so having

an insurance policy that covers it is a good idea.

Canyoning

Unfortunately, there's no cover for Australians or Kiwis. However, residents from all other countries can be covered for canyoning. This means your medical expenses, medical evacuation, and transport expenses home can be covered up to the limits in your policy. If you're banged up and transported home, you'll need to have access to government healthcare, private healthcare, or a way of funding ongoing on treatment, as cover stops as soon as you're home. World Nomads policies are travel insurance policies, not health insurance.

If you read through our [helpdesk](#), you'll be able to find out which policy you need to select and what the conditions are before you buy the policy. Of course, the policy wording will guide you on what's covered and what's not, so it's essential you read that as well before you buy a policy. You aren't able to upgrade your policy after it's been bought, so make sure you've got it right from the start.

Hiking and Trekking

Apart from planning for the weather (and packing correctly), you'll need to know the altitude that you'll be hiking/trekking to in Peru, so that you can buy the correct level of coverage at the time of purchase. Many parts of Peru are thinly populated and remote, which can make it difficult to get help if you don't have insurance. If you get

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You aren't able to upgrade your policy after it's been bought, so make sure you've got it right from the start.

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Weather safety

Weather conditions in Peru can change quickly, so it's best that you're prepared. Search and rescue isn't covered in any of our policies, so make sure you know where you are at all times.

altitude sickness or you're injured on the mountain and don't have the right insurance (or any insurance, for that matter), a heli-evac to get you to medical care can be very expensive.

World Nomads travel insurance policies are designed so that you can choose the right policy for the activities you're doing, giving you access to the help you need when you need it. If you do get injured in the mountains, it's essential that you get in touch with our emergency assistance teams straight away, so that they can support you from the time you fall sick or get injured until the time you recover.

They'll be able to help you get to the nearest hospital, and if you're banged up badly enough, take you home so that you can get the ongoing medical care that you need. However, once you're home, cover stops, so you'll need to have access to government health care or your own private medical insurance for those costs.

If you visit our [helpdesk](#), or read through the activities section of the purchase path, you'll be able to see



the level of cover that you'll need. All plans are different and may require an upgrade for certain activities. Read the policy wording carefully to choose the right plan and/or adventure sport option for your trip.

All of the information we provide about travel insurance is a brief summary only. It does not include all terms, conditions, limitations, exclusions and termination provisions of the travel insurance plans described. Coverage may not be available for residents of all countries, states or provinces. Please carefully read your policy wording for a full description of coverage.

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