

Surprising Peru

From the mystical peaks of the Andes to the verdant Amazon rainforest, Peru defies all expectations with a mix of ancient ruins, colonial cities and endless opportunities for adventure.



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Diverse and all-encompassing, Peru is geographically complex and physically vast, packing in lofty Andean highlands, sweaty jungle lowlands, and cacti-clad desert. It is this multi-faceted trait that draws many curious travelers to its shores. Yet, apart from the well-trodden trail to Cuzco and Macchu Picchu, many parts of Peru still remain off the tourist radar.

Peru once lay at the center of the Inca Empire, which stretched from modern day Colombia to northern Chile and Argentina. Today, although the Inca Empire has long been dissolved, the past still plays an important role in the country. Time-warped Inca cities are still inhabited; and the remains of early civilizations are constantly being discovered.

But beyond history, there is so much more to Peru: from adventurous sports for daredevils to cultural walks in its colonial cities and beach-bumming on its shimmering

coastline. Whatever you crave – be it traditional culture, elegant colonial cities or myriad adventures – Peru is sure to satisfy.

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visit the country. But as always, the journey is more important than the destination. Spend days walking the Inca Trail, threading Peru's backcountry and visiting local tribes, before arriving to see the sun rise over Wayna Picchu peak. Then head down to fly over the mysterious Nazca Lines and decide for yourself how they came

to be. To veer off the beaten path, head north to the adobe city of the Chimú culture, Chan Chan, the largest Pre-Colombian city in South America; then turn east into the Cloud Forest to visit the unknown fortress of Kuélap.

Those with a penchant for colonial grandeur will find themselves seduced by the charm of Arequipa, the 'White City'; sucked into the past by South America's oldest continuously inhabited city, Cuzco; and the pre-Colombian secrets of its capital, Lima.

If it's adventures you're after, Peru has them in abundance. Learn to surf the colossal sand dunes of Huacachina, before traveling to time-warped Huaraz for a spot of rock climbing. End your journey jungle trekking and kayaking in Iquitos, the largest city in the world not accessible by road.

Regardless of what your expectations are, prepare to be surprised as Peru will exceed everything you've ever heard. **WJ**

Old World Splendor: A parade takes place at Plaza de Armas in Cuzco. Left: Women dressed in traditional handwoven clothes.

Colonial Capitals

Admire Spanish colonial styles and savor traditional flavors in Arequipa, Cuzco and Lima

Duration

2 weeks



To get a taste of what the Spaniards left behind, make a whirlwind trip through Peru's historical triangle. Start south in the 'White City', Arequipa, with many of its buildings made from sillar volcanic stone. This is one of Peru's most picturesque cities, littered with elegant architecture and cobblestoned streets, and backdropped by hazy volcanoes. The pulsating heart of Arequipa is Plaza de Armas, which sits at the center of the city, dominated by an impressive sillar cathedral.

If you can drag yourself away, take a side-trip to the vast Colca Canyon, one of the world's deepest at 10,470 feet (3,191 meters). Chivay is the hub of the valley; just a four-hour bus ride away. In the valley, sign up for a multi-day trek to remote villages, and watch the rare Andean Condor soaring in the sky and llamas roaming amidst the shrubs.

From Arequipa, hop on an overnight bus or train to Cuzco. This is the gateway to Peru's most famous sight, Machu Picchu (*see opposite page*). Once the capital of the Inca Empire, Cuzco has a historical flair and oozes bohemian vibes. The city has an eclectic culinary scene, and it's the best place to try some Peruvian delicacies like the *cuy* or barbecued guinea pig, and ocal cocktail, Pisco Sour.

Finish your journey with a visit to the capital city, Lima. At first glance Lima's strange mix of plush urban neighborhoods and chaotic rundown districts may not seem to offer much to the foreign visitor, but if you're eager to learn more about Peru's history, then you'll be glad to know that Lima is home to some of the country's best museums, housing an array of Inca and Pre-Columbian art and artifacts.



Duration

2 weeks

Threading the Inca Trail

Travel thousands of years back in time to the lost kingdom



For over 2,000 years, Peru was the vestige of famous civilizations that once inhabited this sacred land. Begin in the south at one of the world's greatest mysteries, the Nazca Lines. The giant geoglyphs and animal designs marked into the desert can only be seen in their entirety from the air – take to the skies onboard a light aircraft for approximately US\$45-\$60.

From Nazca, head northwest into the Andes to the famed city of the Incas, Machu Picchu, one of the Seven Wonders of the World. If you're short on time, catch a bus to the town of Aguas Calientes, stay the night and start your hike up the mountain at around 4am to see the ancient city at its full glory around sunrise. The ancient city is big enough to warrant an entire day's exploration. You can wander around by yourself, but to

truly understand Machu Picchu, it's best to book onto a tour.

For those with time to spare, venture up the coast to Trujillo. Many travelers usually skip this chaotic city, but they're missing a host of fascinating sites, including Chan Chan, the largest Pre-Columbian city in South America; Huaca del Sol and Huaca de la Luna, the temples of the sun and the moon; and the Chimú Rainbow Temple, home to Peru's bizarre native hairless dogs.

Finish your journey in the country's verdant interior in Chachapoyas, capital of the Amazonas district. Uncover one of Peru's best-kept secrets, the remains of the Kuélap fortress of the Chachapoyas culture, also known as the Cloud Forest People. Set in a stunning mountainous location, Kuélap even rivals Machu Picchu in size and grandeur – and yet, it attracts less than a quarter of its visitors.



On the Wild Side

Adventure buffs alert! A world of trekking, climbing and sand boarding opportunities await

Duration

1-2 weeks



Outdoor-loving adventurers should start their trip near the coast in Ica, just three hours away from Lima. The nearby oasis of Huacachina is a world of its own: a tiny village built in the middle of a desert, flanked by sand dunes that rise up to a few hundred meters. Hop on a dune buggy, go sand boarding, or simply catch sunset atop a dune.

Pack your adventurous spirit and head north to Huaraz, one of the highest cities in Peru at 10,000 feet (3,052 meters) above sea level. Besides its traditional flair, Huaraz is a mecca for climbers and mountaineers. You'll find plenty of tours to take you climbing into the Andes, as well as shops renting and selling equipment.

After you've had your fill of climbing, pay homage to the town of Yungay, site of one of the Andes'

worst natural disasters, the Ancash earthquake. This is the gateway to the Cordillera Blanca, home to Husacarán, Peru's highest mountain at 22,200 feet (6,768m) above sea level. Get a lift up the mountain or sign up for a guided trek to see the limpid blue pools and emerald lakes Lagunas Llanganuco, a perfect place for hiking

and boating.

Finally, leave the highlands behind and head back to Lima for your flight to Iquitos, Peru's most remote city, deep within the dense Amazon rainforest. Relive your Indiana Jones fantasies with treks through the jungle and kayaking down the Amazon River.



Duration

1-2 weeks

Lakes, Rivers and Seas

Plunge beneath the surface and float amidst the water world



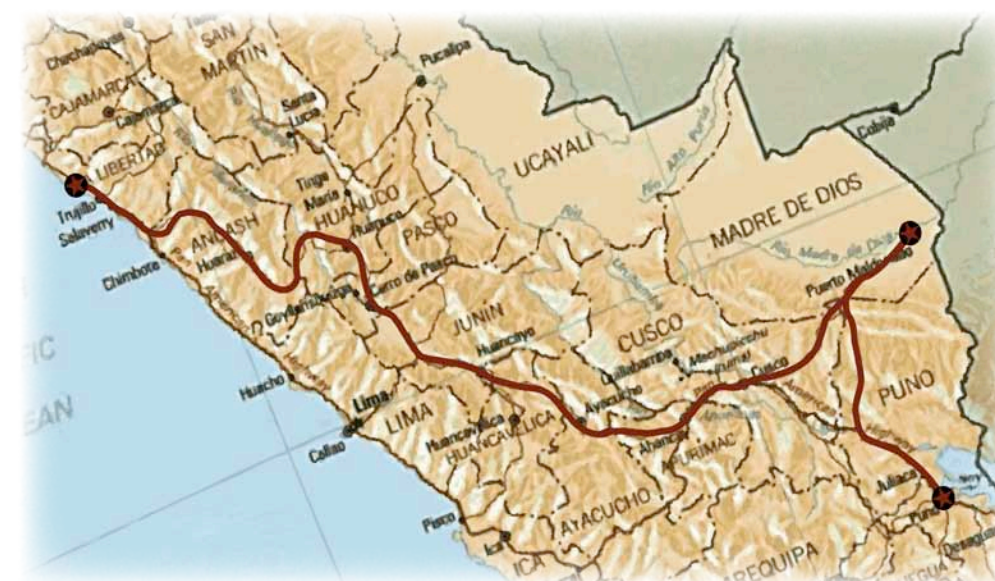
After a few weeks of intensively travel, kick back and indulge in the beautiful town of Puno, situated right on the sparkling shores of Lake Titicaca. This is a world where Andean peaks collide with green valleys and shimmering sun-drenched islands. Walk the streets

of Puno to see local women in layered skirts and fancy bowler hats standing against crumbling colonial façades, then hop on a boat to visit the Uros tribes who live on floating reed isles, sail on a *tоторa* (reed boat) and hike to the top of Isla Taquile for a view of the extensive lake.

Next, gear yourself up for some

jungle action in the northeastern Amazonian city of Puerto Maldonado. While not a tourist destination in its own right, Puerto Maldonado is one of the best places from which to explore the Amazon Basin and the mighty river itself. Board the Madre de Dios Ferry to get a glimpse of life on the water as you pass ramshackle boats and *peki-peki*s (canoes powered by small motorcycle engines).

Once you've finished exploring the country's many lakes and rivers, head to the coast to the small, friendly town of Huanchaco, one of Peru's top surfing spots. Spend a few days here taking lessons from local surf masters and admire the views over plates of Peru's most famous seafood dish, *ceviche*. If the surfing bug really gets you, take a detour up the coast to Chicama, home of the longest swell in the world.





Highlights of Peru

Iquitos

Jungle hikes and Amazon River boat trips are commonplace in Peru's most remote city, also the largest city in the world not accessible by road.



Machu Picchu

Explore the Sacred Valley of the Incas and be awed by the ancient city of Machu Picchu, the highlight of any South American adventure.



Cuzco

Step back in time in South America's oldest continuously inhabited city as you wander its vibrant streets and nibble on local delicacies.



Lake Titicaca

Float into the water world of the Uros tribes and learn their way of life.



Peru's Diversity: From Lake Titicaca (top right) to cobble streets of Cuzco (middle right) to the beautiful beach of Huanchaco (bottom right).



The mysterious Nazca Lines

Fly over these 2000-year-old geoglyphs and decide for yourself why they were placed there.



The "White City", Arequipa

Be seduced by Peru's most picturesque city and watch condors soar over the vast Colca Canyon, one of the deepest in the world.



Essential INFORMATION

When to Go

The weather in Peru varies greatly from region to region, although generally there are two seasons – wet and dry. The best time to go depends on where you want to visit. The peak season, which lasts from June to August, corresponds with the cooler dry season in the Andes, making it the best time to trek the Inca Trail and visit Machu Picchu.

If you're heading for coastal Peru, though, the best time to visit is between late December and March, when the weather is at its hottest and great for hitting the beach. For the rest of the year, the coast is shrouded in a thick fog. It's also best to avoid the rainy season, from December to March if traveling in the south or east of the country, as flooding and landslides can make getting around difficult.

Getting There

There are five international airports in Peru, the main one being Jorge Chávez International, just outside Lima. You can fly direct to Peru from a number of US cities including New York, Washington DC, Atlanta, Miami, Fort Lauderdale, Houston and Los Angeles for around US\$650 – US\$800 return. The flight time from Miami is

approximately 5.5 hours.

Getting Around

The only practical way to travel around Peru is by bus, although the distances are very long and journeys often take up to 12 hours or more. There are different standards of buses, depending on how much you're willing to pay. While some seem pretty rickety, most are very comfortable, have on-board toilets and TVs, and provide you with meals, pillows and blankets. It's best to go to the local bus station to buy your tickets a day or two in advance.

Accommodation

There's a large variety of accommodation in Peru to suit all tastes and budgets, ranging from backpacker hostels to family-run guesthouses and luxury hotels.

One of the most luxurious and atmospheric hotels in Cuzco is the **Hotel Monasterio by Orient Express**. Set in the grounds of a colonial monastery, the hotel is a historic national monument dating back to 1592. The hotel even provides oxygen enriched rooms to combat the effects of altitude. Rates start from US\$445 per night.

Hotel Antigua Miraflores, situated

in the upmarket Miraflores district of Lima, is a mid-range choice, starting from US\$99 per night for a double room. Housed in an elegant salmon-pink mansion on a quiet leafy street, it is both charming and characteristic.

An excellent budget option in Arequipa is **Hostal Santa Catalina**, opposite the Santa Catalina Convent. Rooms are centered around a yellow Spanish courtyard; the roof terrace provides some of the best views in the city overlooking the majestic El Misti volcano. Rates start from US\$23.

Cost of Travel

The currency in Peru is the Nuevo Sol (PEN), with the current exchange rate at US\$1 to 2.67PEN. Travel in Peru is very affordable and you can go far for a reasonable price. For comfortable overnight buses with meals included, expect to pay between US\$20-US\$30 per person. In major cities you'll pay about US\$1.50 for a short taxi ride and 25-50 centavos for a colectivo or local minibus. For a set lunch at a local café including starter, main and dessert, you'll pay only around US\$5, although expect to pay more at proper restaurants frequented by tourists.

Websites

Here are some helpful links:

Lonely Planet Peru
Peru Tourism Bureau
Peru Travel Guide



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Automobiles &
Bicycles & Segways
& Camels & Yachts
& Rickshaws &
Gondolas & Kayaks
& Ziplines & Jet Skis.

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