



# South Coast

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## Why Go?

The main mystery that preoccupies outsiders as they inspect the barren, foggy, uncompromisingly dry desert that infests Peru's southern coastline for the first time (usually from the window of a crowded bus) is, how does anyone live here? It, thus, comes as a surprise to discover that people don't just live here, they positively thrive – check out Ica's wine industry or Chincha's Afro-Peruvian culture if you want proof. What's more, they've been thriving for millennia. The perplexing Nazca Lines, a weird collection of giant geoglyphs etched into the desert, date from 400–650 AD, while intricate cloths unearthed on the Paracas peninsula were woven 1000 years before Pachacuti led the Incas out of Cuzco. Though Machu Picchu hogs most of the limelight in Southern Peru, the south coast is pierced by a lesser 'gringo trail' whose obligatory stops include adventure nexus Lunahuaná, wildlife obsessed Paracas, Nazca and the desert oasis of Huacachina.

## Best Places to Eat

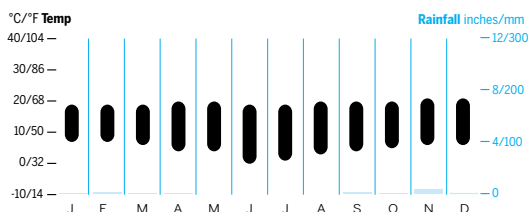
- » Café Da Vinci (p133)
- » As de Oro's (p110)
- » Via La Encantada (p127)
- » El Chorito (p115)

## Best Places to Stay

- » Casa-Hacienda San José (p107)
- » Hotel El Huacachinero (p120)
- » Hotel El Molino (p106)
- » Nazca Lines Hotel (p126)

## When to Go

### Nazca



**Jan–Mar** High summer means main coastal beach resorts are open and pulsating with energy.

**Mar** Grape harvest and accompanying wine festivals in Lunahuaná and Ica.

**Jun & Jul** Cooler temperatures, fewer tourists and esoteric festivals in Chincha and Ica.

## Pucusana

📍01 / POP 10,000

Materializing out of the fog and grime that hangs over Lima's southern suburbs, Pucusana marks the first genuinely worthwhile stop on the coast. Superficially, it's a typical Peruvian fishing village: clamorous, a little grubby and packed with literally hundreds of wooden boats bobbing around in its protected harbor. But there's an innate soulfulness here too. If you've just waltzed out of Miraflores thinking you'd arrived in a Latin American version of LA, this will feel more like the real warts-and-all Peru.

The small Pucusana and Las Ninfas beaches are on the town's seafront or you can catch a boat (S1) to La Isla, an offshore island with a lofty hill and a strand of sand. The most exclusive beach in the area is Naplo, 1km away and reached through a tunnel. The **Gremio de Pescadores de Puscana** (fishing port) is quite a scene at any time of day with oil-skinned fishermen battling with huge whale-sized fish while snappy-beaked pelicans inspect their work from close quarters. Just outside the entrance, boats gather offering fishing trips and tours of the marina (from S40).

The best of the simple hotels in Pucusana, **El Mirador de Pucusana** (📍430-9228; s/d/tr S30/40/55) enjoys a lofty perch atop the bayfront with good views. Rooms are basic, but do have hot water. If you're hankering for fresh seafood, you'll find it in the *cevicherías* (restaurants serving ceviche) that line the boardwalk below. **Restaurante Jhony** (mains S20-30) is the best of the cluster; try the *tortillita de camarones*, a thick tasty omelet full of prawns with most of their anatomy still intact.

From central Lima, *combis* (minibuses) run frequently to Pucusana from Plaza Bolognesi (S5 one way). An alternative is to take a taxi from Lima to the Puente Primavera bridge at the intersection of Av Primavera and Carr Panamericana Sur. Southbound coastal buses along Carr Panamericana Sur leave from here and can drop you off at Km 57, from where minibuses shuttle during daylight hours to central Pucusana (S1, 10 minutes).

For beaches closer to Lima, see p99.

## Asia

📍01 / POP 4000

With a growth rate that could emulate anywhere on the Asian side of the Pacific Rim, Peru's namesake 'Asia' is a nebulous commercial area south of Lima that incorporates more than 30 beaches, thousands of pricey holiday homes, and a humungous shopping mall known as El Sur Plaza Boulevard which opened in 2003. Most of the action is centered around the 97.5km marker of Carr Panamericana Sur; although clubs, restaurants and condos are now spreading as far north as Pucusana and as far south as Cerro Azul. Traditional Peru this most certainly isn't (think more mini-Dubai), though it's a lively place with young moneyed Limeños dropping by for nightlife and beach bumming opportunities in season (January to March). The rest of the year, it can be pretty dead.

Almost any bus along Carr Panamericana Sur can drop you here upon request. There are some basic guesthouses on the main boulevard that are quite expensive, but Lima is less than an hour away with countless buses leaving 24/7. Fares start at S16.

## Cañete & Cerro Azul

📍01 / POP 37,000

The full name of this small market town and transport nexus, about 145km south of Lima, is San Vicente de Cañete. Most Peruvian holidaymakers head north of town to Cerro Azul, a beach that's popular with experienced surfers. It's a 15-minute walk west of Km 131 on Carr Panamericana Sur; about 15km north of town. There's a small Inca sea fort in the area, known as **Huarco**, but it's in a poor state.

In Cerro Azul, the surfer-friendly **Hostal Cerro Azul** (📍271-1302, www.cerroazulhostal.com; Puerto Viejo 106; d/tr/q/ste S150/185/200/220) is less than 100m from the shoreline. If you're hungry, beachfront restaurants all serve fresh seafood. **Restaurant Juanito** (📍335-3710; Rivera del Mar; mains S20-25; ☺8am-9pm) is a popular local pick.

From Lima, buses for Pisco or Ica can drop you at Cañete and sometimes Cerro Azul (S18 to S21, 2½ hours). Buses back to Lima are invariably crowded, especially on Sunday from January to April. There are also *combis* between Cañete and Cerro Azul (S1, 30 minutes) or south to Chincha (S2, one hour).