

# Peru

## HIGHLIGHTS

- **Machu Picchu** (p825) Trek a breathless rite of passage to awe-inspiring ancient Inca ruins hidden in cloud forest.
- **Cuzco** (p811) Pound colonial Andean cobblestone streets, take in historical museums and trek humbling Inca hillsides.
- **Arequipa** (p798) Embrace wild *arequipeña* nightlife under the watchful eye of imposing volcanoes and sunken canyons.
- **Lake Titicaca** (p806) Visit storybook isles on what's considered the world's largest high-altitude lake, straddling the Peru–Bolivia border.
- **Huaraz, and the Cordilleras Blanca and Huayhuash** (p846) Play high-adrenaline Andes junkie: tackle one of South America's most spectacular mountain ranges.
- **Off the Beaten Track** (p804) Go deep in the Central Andes into Cañón del Cotahuasi: dramatic volcanoes, beautiful waterfalls, unique local color and no tourists!

## FAST FACTS

- **Area:** 1,285,220 sq km (five times larger than the UK)
- **Budget:** US\$20 to US\$30 a day
- **Capital:** Lima
- **Costs:** comfortable double room in Cuzco US\$35 to US\$50, 1L bottled water US\$0.65, domestic flight US\$65 to US\$215
- **Country Code:** ☎ 51
- **Languages:** Spanish, Quechua, Aymara
- **Money:** US\$1 = S2.90 (nuevos soles)
- **Population:** 29.5 million
- **Seasons:** high (June to August), rainy (November to April)
- **Time:** GMT minus five hours



## TRAVEL HINT

Book Inca Trail treks at least six weeks in advance, or several months for trips during the high season (June to August).

## OVERLAND ROUTES

Border crossings include Arica (Chile); Huaquillas, Guayaquil and Macará (Ecuador); Kasani and Desaguadero (Bolivia); and multiple Brazilian and Bolivian towns and river ports in the Amazon.

Imagine scenery on the epic scale of an Indiana Jones or Lara Croft flick: forgotten temples entangled in jungle vines, cobwebbed ancient tombs baking in the desert sun and bejeweled buried treasures beyond all reckoning. Wild rivers that rage, pumas prowling in the night and hallucinogenic shaman rituals – it's not just a movie here, it's real life.

Like a continent in miniature, Peru will astound you with its diversity. Not even fierce Inca warriors or Spanish conquistadors could totally dominate such jaw-dropping terrain, from glaciated Andean peaks where majestic condors soar, to almost limitless coastal deserts, to the steamy rainforests of the Amazon basin.

Take it easy on the 'Gringo Trail' encircling the country's top highlights, ending at the cloud-topping Inca citadel of Machu Picchu. Or step off the beaten path and groove to Afro-Peruvian beats, chase perfect waves off a paradisiacal Pacific beach or ride a slow boat down the Amazon.

Wherever your journey takes you in Peru, you'll be welcomed by big-hearted folks that tackle their often-unfortunate lot with gusto and a deep lust for life. Small wonder, then, that the land of the Incas is one of the continent's top picks for adventurous travelers.

## CURRENT EVENTS

Try as it may, Peru remained a hotbed of political corruption as the 2000s came to a close. President Alan García Pérez gave a healthy chunk of his cabinet the pink slip in late 2008 after a widespread corruption scandal rocked his administration – audiotapes surfaced that incriminated members of his APRA party in efforts to steer lucrative petroleum contracts to favored bidders in exchange for bribes. Meanwhile, one of García's recent predecessors, the formerly exiled Alberto Fujimori, was sentenced to 25 years in prison after being found guilty on human-rights abuse charges stemming from killings and kidnappings by state-run death squads under his watch.

Speaking of violence, the Maoist Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path), Peru's most prominent though long-dormant terrorist group, ambushed a military convoy near Huancavelica in 2008, killing 19 and injuring 11. The most violent attack by the group in 10 years showed terrorism in Peru still bubbles below the surface.

But it wasn't all guns and corruption for García's administration, there were some roses too: his government has sponsored a fast and furious push to develop free-trade agreements, starting with the US, and during the APEC summit in Peru in 2008 developing agreements with Japan, South Korea and China. Peru's economy, though stalled by the global recession that began in 2007 and continues at the time of writing, has seen sustained growth during García's administration – fruits of the laborious economic stabilization efforts began by President Alejandro Toledo, who left office in 2006. Next elections are scheduled for 2011.

Meanwhile, Machu Picchu was – rightfully so – named one of the New Seven Wonders of the World in 2007. But as the site approaches

its centenary in 2011, it remains embroiled in a dispute with Yale University (see boxed text, p826) over the return of long-lost artifacts.

## HISTORY

### Early Cultures

The Inca civilization is merely the tip of Peru's archaeological iceberg.

The country's first inhabitants were loose-knit bands of nomadic hunters, fishers and gatherers, living in caves and killing fearsome (now extinct) animals like giant sloths, saber-toothed tigers and mastodons. Domestication of the llama, alpaca and guinea pig began between 7000 and 4000 BC. Various forms of the faithful potato (Peru boasts almost 4000 varieties!) were domesticated around 3000 BC.

Roughly from 1000 to 300 BC, the Early Horizon or Chavín Period evidenced at Chavín de Huántar near Huaraz (p853) saw widespread settled communities, plus the interchange of ideas, enhanced skills and cultural complexity, although the Chavín culture inexplicably disappeared around 300 BC. The next 500 years saw the rise and fall of the Paracas culture south of Lima, who produced some of the most exquisite textiles in the Americas.

Between AD 100 and 700 pottery, metalwork and textiles reached new heights of technological development, and the Moche built their massive pyramids near Trujillo (p839) and at Sipán near Chiclayo (p842). It was also around this time that the Nazca sculpted their enigmatic lines in the desert (p795).

From about AD 600 to 1000 the first Andean expansionist empire emerged, and the influence of the Wari (Huari), from north of Ayacucho (p831), can still be seen throughout most of Peru.