Downtown Lima Walking Tour

In the historical center of Lima, every turn is a blast from the city's colonial past. This is the best of its architecture in churches, palaces, plazas and catacombs.

Start Plaza San Martín
End El Barrio Chino
Length 3km; two hours

1. Begin in Plaza San Martín to imbibe the faded grandeur of Gran Hotel Bolívar (201-619-7171; www.granhotelsbolivar.com.pe), the city's first fine hotel.

2. Walk the pedestrian street of Jirón de la Unión: once the heart of aristocratic city life, it's now lined with cinemas and bargain shoe stores.

3. Iglesia de la Merced (201-427-8199; 10am-noon & 5-7pm) was originally built in 1541. It held the first Mass in Lima. Peek inside at the impressive mahogany altars.

4. Explore Plaza de Armas, including the Catedral de Lima and the Palacio Arzobispal, home to some of the city's best-preserved ornate Moorish balconies.

5. To the northeast, the grandiose baroque Palacio de Gobierno (201-311-3908; www.presidencia.gob.pe; tours 9am & 9:45am Sat & Sun) serves as Peru's presidential palace; pass at noon for the ceremonious changing of the guard.

6. Across the street, the Museo del Pisco merits a stop, though you might want to save it to end your walk with a handcrafted pisco cocktail instead.

7. Follow Río Rimac to Parque de la Muralla, a spacious city park installed alongside remains of the original city wall.

8. Return to Lampa and Monasterio de San Francisco to check out the monastery's catacombs that hold skulls and bones laid out in geometric designs.

9. The Mercado Central (20958-849-731; 7am-9pm Mon-Sat, to 6pm Sun) overflows with goods, from soccer jerseys to piles of tropical and Andean fruit.

10. Finish your tour in El Barrio Chino (Chinatown) for tea or lunch at a Cantonese eatery.

Take a Break...
Wa Lok is the quintessential Peruvian chifa (Chinese restaurant).