



PERU

TOP SIGHTS, AUTHENTIC EXPERIENCES

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Welcome to Peru

Peru is as complex as its most intricate and exquisite weavings. Festivals mark ancient rites, the urban vanguard beams innovation and nature brims with splendid diversity.

Peru's rich cultural heritage is never more real and visceral than when you are immersed street-side in the swirling madness of a festival. Deities of old are reincarnated as Christian saints, pilgrims climb mountains in the dead of night and icons are paraded through crowded plazas. History is potent here and still pulsing, and there is no better way to experience it.

Visitors make pilgrimage to the glorious Inca citadel of Machu Picchu, yet this feted site is just a flash in a 5000-year history of peoples. Explore the dusted remnants of Chan Chan, the largest pre-Columbian ruins in all the Americas. Fly over the puzzling geoglyphs etched into the arid earth at Nazca. And spend time in Lima's great museums, which reveal the sophistication and skill of these lost civilizations.

Few destinations have such madly diverse terrain. From the glaciated peaks of the Cordilleras to the sweltering untamed Amazon – the world's most biodiverse forest – Peru dazzles with opportunities to explore outdoors. Trekking routes abound, rafting is increasingly popular, as is mountain biking and surfing. Then grab your binoculars to see a staggering array of bird and animal life.

One question haunts all Peruvians: what to eat? Ceviche with slivers of fiery chili and corn, slow-simmered stews, velvety Amazonian chocolate – in the capital of Latin cooking, the choices dazzle.

Giant sand dunes, chiseled peaks and Pacific breaks a few heartbeats away from the capital's rush-hour traffic: take this big place in small bites and don't rush. And that's when you realize: in Peru the adventure usually lies in getting there.

“Giant sand dunes, chiseled peaks and Pacific breaks”



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Llamas in the Cordilleras (p235)

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The Amazon Basin

The world's most biodiverse forest

The Amazon Basin (p253) is as close to visiting an alien planet as you can get on Earth. The abundance of plants and animal life can make it seem as if new creatures are created here. The forest's diversity is matched only by the uniqueness of its people, with tribes that have still never had any interaction with external civilization. Set aside ample time to visit the national parks, which grow more intriguing the deeper you get.



The Sacred Valley

Village markets and ancient ruins

Andean villages, crumbling Inca military outposts and agricultural terraces used since time immemorial are linked by the Río Urubamba as it curves through the Sacred Valley (p181). Located between Cuzco and Machu Picchu, this picturesque destination is an ideal base for exploring the area's famed markets and historic structures and remote agricultural villages.

Top: A woman weaving; Bottom left: Market, Pisac (p190); Bottom right: Sacred Valley

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Arequipa

Cuisine and architecture in an ethereal cityscape

Crowned by dazzling baroque *mestizo* (mixed indigenous and Spanish) architecture hewn out of the local white *sillar* rock, Arequipa (p89) is primarily a Spanish colonial city that hasn't strayed far from its conception. Its beautiful natural setting amid volcanoes and high pampa is complemented by a 400-year-old monastery, a huge cathedral and innovative fusion cuisine.

La Catedral (p98)

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The Cordilleras

Ground zero for outdoor adventure in Peru

The Cordilleras (p235) are one of the pre-eminent hiking, trekking and backpacking spots in South America. Every which way you throw your gaze, perennially glaciated white peaks razor their way through expansive mantles of lime-green valleys. The Cordillera Blanca is one of the highest mountain ranges in the world and boasts the enigmatic 3000-year-old ruins of Chavín de Huántar.

Cordillera Huayhuash (p240)

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Plan Your Trip

Need to Know



When to Go



High Season (Jun–Aug)

- Dry season in Andean highlands and eastern rainforest.
- Best time for festivals, highland sports and treks.
- Peak time due to North American and European holidays.

Shoulder (Sep–Nov & Mar–May)

- Spring and fall weather in the highlands.
- Ideal for less crowded visits.
- September to November good for rainforest trekking.

Low Season (Dec–Feb)

- Rainy season in the highlands and in the Amazon.
- The Inca Trail closes during February for cleanup.
- High season for the coast and beach activities.

Currency

Nuevo sol (S)

Languages

Spanish, Aymara and Quechua

Visas

Generally not required for stays of up to 183 days.

Money

ATMs widely available in larger cities and towns. Credit cards widely accepted. Traveler's checks not widely accepted.

Cell Phones

Local SIM cards (and top-up credits) are cheap and widely available, and can be used on unlocked tri-band GSM 1900 world phones.

Time

Eastern Standard Time (EST), five hours behind Greenwich Mean Time (GMT); same as New York City, without daylight savings time.

Daily Costs

Budget: Less than \$300

- Budget hotel room or dorm bed: \$25–85
- Set lunches or supermarket takeout: less than \$15
- Entry to historic sights: around \$10

Midrange: \$300–\$550

- Double room in midrange hotel: \$140
- Multicourse lunch at midrange restaurant: \$40
- Group tours: from \$120

Top end: More than \$550

- Double room in top-end hotel: \$300
- Private city tour: from \$180
- Fine restaurant dinner: from \$70

Useful Websites

Lonely Planet (lonelyplanet.com/peru) Destination information, hotel bookings, traveler forum and more.

Bus Portal Peru (www.busportal.pe) Tickets for buses throughout the country.

Exchange Rates (www.xe.com) Current exchange rates.

Expat Peru (www.expattru.com) Useful for government offices and customs regulations.

Latin America Network Information Center (www.lanic.utexas.edu) Diverse, informative links including academic research.

Living in Peru (www.livinginperu.com) An English-language guide with articles and restaurant reviews.

Peru Reports (www.perureports.com) Alternative English-language news.

Peruvian Times (www.peruviantimes.com) The latest news, in English.

Opening Hours

Opening hours vary throughout the year. We've provided high-season opening hours; hours will generally decrease in the shoulder and low seasons.

Banks 9am–6pm Monday to Friday, some 9am–6pm Saturday

Government offices and businesses 9am–5pm Monday to Friday

Museums Often close on Monday

Restaurants 10am–10pm, many close 3pm–6pm

Shops 9am–6pm Monday to Friday, some open Saturday

Arriving in Peru

Many flights arrive in the wee hours, so be sure to have a hotel booked ahead.

Aeropuerto Internacional Jorge Chávez, Lima (p65)

Taxi Thirty minutes to one hour (rush hour) from the airport to Miraflores, Barranco or San Isidro, faster for downtown Lima; should cost \$45 to \$60.

Getting Around

Public transport in Peru is cheap, with options plentiful and frequent.

Light Rail Lima's Metropolitano offers efficient, fast service to downtown.

Train Expensive and geared toward tourists.

Car Useful for traveling at your own pace, though cities can be difficult to navigate and secure parking is a must.

Bus Cheapest option, with reclining seats on better long-distance buses.

Taxi A good option for sightseeing, shared taxis are common in the provinces.

