

# Lima



On its surface, Lima is no thing of beauty. A sprawling desert city clinging precariously to dusty cliffs, it spends much of the year marinated in a perpetual fog that turns the sky the color of Styrofoam. It is loud, chaotic, and gritty; much of its architecture is bulky and gray. Foreign travelers tend to scuttle through on their way to more pastoral destinations in the Andes.

This is unfortunate. Lima may not wear its treasures on its sleeve, but peel back the foggy layers and you'll find pre-Columbian temples sitting silently amid condominium high-rises. Vestiges of colonial mansions proudly display lavish, Moorish-style balconies. And, here and there, graceful modernist structures channel architecture's most hopeful era.

What Lima lacks in attractiveness, it makes up with a huge array of downright literary experiences. Stately museums display sublime pottery; edgy art spaces host multimedia installations. There are solemn religious processions dating back to the 18th century and crowded nightclubs swaying to tropical beats. You'll find encyclopedic bookstores and cavernous shopping malls, well-heeled private golf clubs and baroque churches ornamented with the skulls of saints. It's a cultural phantasmagoria with a profusion of exceptional eateries, from humble to high-brow, all part of a gastronomic revolution more than 400 years in the making.

This is Lima. Shrouded in history, gloriously messy and full of aesthetic delights. Don't even think of missing it.

## HIGHLIGHTS

- Dipping into the continent's most inventive cuisine at the bustling restaurants of **Miraflores** (p112)
- Admiring sublime Moche portrait vessels and naughty erotic pots at the **Museo Larco** (p95)
- Sipping a simple beer or a high-brow fusion cocktail at the vintage bars and chic lounges of always-hopping **Barranco** (p116)
- Walking around the sandy ruins of several civilizations' worth of temples at **Pachacamac** (p122)
- Leaping off the Miraflores clifftops and **paragliding** (p101) past the shoppers and diners at the trendy **LarcoMar shopping mall** (p119)
- Gazing upon the skulls of some of Latin America's most celebrated saints at the **Iglesia de Santo Domingo** (p90) in Central Lima



■ TELEPHONE CODE: 01

■ POPULATION: 8.5 million  
(Greater Metropolitan Area)

■ AVERAGE TEMPERATURE:  
January 17°C to 27°C,  
July 11°C to 21°C

## HISTORY

Lima has survived endless cycles of destruction and rebirth. Regular apocalyptic earthquakes, warfare and the rise and fall of civilizations have resulted in a city that is as ancient as it is new. In pre-Hispanic times, the area served, at one time or another, as an urban center for the Lima, Wari, Ichma and even the Inca cultures. When Francisco Pizarro sketched out the boundaries of his 'City of Kings' in January of 1535, there were roughly 200,000 indigenous people living in the area.

By the 18th century, the Spaniards' tumbledown village of adobe and wood had given way to a viceregal capital, where fleets of ships arrived to transport the conquest's golden spoils back to Europe. In 1746, a disastrous earthquake wiped out much of the city, but the rebuilding was rapid and streets were soon lined with baroque churches and ample *casornas* (mansions). The city's importance began to fade after independence in 1821, when other urban centers were crowned capitals of newly independent states.

In 1880, Lima found itself under siege when it was ransacked and occupied by the Chilean military during the War of the Pacific (1879–83). As part of the pillage, the Chileans made off with thousands of tomes from the National Library (though they would eventually return them – in 2007). The war was followed by another period of expansion, and by the 1920s Lima was crisscrossed by a network of broad boulevards inspired by Parisian urban design. Once again, however, a devastating earthquake struck, this time in 1940, and the city again had to be rebuilt.

By the mid-1900s the number of inhabitants began to grow exponentially. An influx of rural poor took the metro area population from 661,000 in 1940 to 8.5 million by 2007. The migration was particularly intense during the 1980s, when the conflict between the military and assorted guerilla groups in the Andes sent victims of the violence flocking to the capital. Shantytowns mushroomed, crime soared and the city fell into a period of steep decay. In 1992, the terrorist group Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) detonated deadly truck bombs in middle-class Miraflores, marking one of Lima's darkest hours.

But the city has again dusted itself off and rebuilt – to an astonishing degree. A robust economy and a vast array of municipal improvement efforts have led to repaved streets,

refurbished parks, and cleaner and safer public areas, not to mention a thriving cultural and culinary life.

## ORIENTATION

Planted on the sandy foothills of the Andes, Lima is a rambling metropolis composed of more than 30 municipalities or districts. The city's historic heart, Lima Centro (Central Lima), lies at a bend on the southern banks of the Río Rimac. Here, around the Plaza de Armas, a grid of crowded streets laid out in the days of Pizarro houses most of the city's surviving colonial architecture. On this neighborhood's southern flank, around the Plaza San Martín, the Plaza Bolognesi and the Parque de la Cultura, the city takes on a 19th-century veneer, where grand boulevards are lined with extravagant (if decayed) structures built in a panoply of architectural styles, from Victorian to beaux arts.

From this point, Av Arequipa, one of the city's principal thoroughfares, plunges southeast, through Santa Beatriz, Jesús María and Lince, before arriving in well-to-do San Isidro. This is Lima's banking center and one of its most affluent settlements. San Isidro quickly gives way to the contiguous, seaside neighbourhood of Miraflores, which serves as Lima's contemporary core, bustling with commerce, restaurants and nightlife. Immediately to the south lies Barranco, a stately turn-of-the-20th-century resort community. Long the city's bohemian center, today it boasts some of the most hopping bars in the city.

The airport resides in the port city of Callao, about 12km west of downtown or 20km northwest of Miraflores. The area is also home to a naval base, an old colonial fort and the pleasant seaside community of La Punta.

The principal bus routes connecting Central Lima with San Isidro and Miraflores run along broad avenues such as Tacna, Garcilaso de la Vega and Arequipa. These neighborhoods are also connected by the short highway Paseo de la República or Vía Expresa, known informally as *el zanjón* (the ditch).

## Street Names

The city is generally laid out in a grid with street numbers that are easy to follow, jumping to the next 100 for each *cuadra* (block; ie 'cuadra 5' will be numbered from 500 to 599). However, street names can be confusing. For one, they change with alarming