

Peru: readers' tips, recommendations and travel advice

Readers share their advice on visiting Peru. Send us your tips on river cruising for the chance to win a trip to Hong Kong.



Mount Chicon and the Cordillera Urubamba Photo: ALAMY

This week's winning tip

Head north

Fly with LAN (0800 977 6100; lan.com) and ask your GP for acetazolamide, which helps prevent altitude sickness. In Cuzco, stay at the Hotel Rumi Punku (rumipunku.com), which, among other things, has lush courtyards with an original Incan doorway. Karina here will help you book all tours. Stop in Ollantaytambo (elalbergue.com) and fall out of bed on to the train.

As well as Machu Picchu, inspired by a 'Telegraph' article last year, we headed for Trujillo/Chiclayo in northern Peru for the pre-Incan Moche civilisation, with sacrifices and adobe pyramids. Eat ceviche by the Pacific.

No crowded, shepherded tour buses here – in fact, you might be the only visitors at some of the sites. Book through Contunor, a local company (contunor.com). Add the Nazca lines or Lake Titicaca or blow it all staying at the Sanctuary Hotel at Machu Picchu, the choice is yours.

Mike Hindmarch, Northants

More advice from readers

Sanctuary

We booked our trip through JLA (020 3582 5510; journeylatinamerica.co.uk), including a day trek on the Inca Trail. We recommend acclimatising in Cuzco first and hiring walking sticks and waterproofs for the trek. Also reducing luggage, as this has to be carried. Catching the early morning train with our Inca guide, we disembarked halfway through the journey. The trek was physically exhausting but it allowed us to enter Machu Picchu through the Inca "Sun Gate".

That night we stayed at the Sanctuary Lodge (sanctuarylodgeth.com). Located opposite the park entrance, this truly is a sanctuary – peaceful, surrounded by majestic peaks and surprisingly luxurious. Our second night was in the valley at the Inkaterra Hotel (inkaterra.com), famous for its orchid garden. An unforgettable trip.

Elsbeth Lea-Wilson, Bucks

Away from it all

If you want to experience a different part of Peru, head north to Chachapoyas in the heart of the Andean foothills.

It is away from the main tourist route and surrounded by cloud forest, and you have access to two of Peru's greatest wonders. Only discovered in 2005, the world's third highest "freefalling" waterfall, Gocta Falls (2,530 ft, 771m), is spectacular – and with only about 20 visitors a day, it is surely one of the most underrated natural wonders anywhere in the world.

Kuelap, a giant, well-preserved, ancient fortress, has an incredible clifftop setting – worth a whole day's exploration while admiring the views and basking in the Andean sunshine. Eat at Cicciolina (Calle Triunfo 393-2do Piso; 51 84 239510; cicciolinacuzco.com) for an affordable taste of luxury in Cuzco which serves interesting, well-executed food in a friendly setting in the heart of the city. Try sitting in the bar area where you have access to the restaurant, tapas and bar menus without a cover charge, and where you can fully enjoy the atmosphere. Highlights include local specialities, good wine and a rump of lamb served with a delicious smoked fava mash. Also recommended is its sister restaurant Baco (Cable Ruinas 465), a touch more relaxed and rustic – comfort food, far from home.

Tom Arnold, Oxfordshire

No sweets

If you're visiting Peru's poorer areas take rubber-tipped pencils, crayons and pencil-sharpeners for the schools, bubbles, balloons and bouncy balls for the children, but definitely not sweets – so many children's teeth are already rotten. If travelling, also pick up the free toiletries available in hotels for their mothers.

Anne Bickmore, East Sussex

Coca leaves

Reduce the symptoms of altitude sickness, or keep them at bay, with coca or *mate* (pronounced mattay) tea. Made from raw coca leaves, it's drunk by the locals and is freely available in hotels, in constantly replenished urns, and in supermarkets in teabags. My family and I all experienced varying degrees of fatigue, nausea, headaches and shortness of breath until we made a habit of drinking coca tea daily (no more than five cups a day because it's a stimulant). Not only did it help but it's refreshing and tasty too.

Lisa Humphrys, Kent

Puno base

Lake Titicaca is a must while in Peru – after all, according to the Incas it's where the world was created. We stayed in Puno while visiting, a town full of cultural sites and also in a great position to visit Machu Picchu.

Sally Hay, Hull

Go bananas

To prevent tiredness, headaches and dizziness do not rush about at altitude, but walk at a reasonably slow pace. Also, eat lots of bananas, to replace the potassium that is leached from the body at high altitude. All of this worked for my husband and me during our stay in Peru and we had the most wonderful time.

Judith Cochrane, address withheld

The Shaman's arts

For an unforgettable cultural experience, a visit to the coastal areas surrounding Trujillo allows you to dip your toe into the mythical arts of Shamanism. Administered by the Curandero, these healing ceremonies are relatively easy to find and prove a breathtaking and authentic experience you won't find on any guided tour, but just remember to take it easy with the dancing if in your first few days as the altitude will take a little getting used to.

Bryn Ike, London

Take note

Peru is a wonderful destination; here are some tips to help you enjoy your stay. Bank notes, including dollars, which can be used everywhere, will only be accepted if completely free from blemish – no writing, not even little tears at the edge. Those



providing change or changing money are often tempted to sneak a few damaged notes in to what they give you, so it becomes your problem. But you can change them when you get back home.

Plan your first day at altitude as a day of rest, or optional activities. Then if you get badly affected by altitude sickness, your itinerary will not be affected.

Our last day's activities required us to find a taxi to take us to the office of a travel agency which was holding our luggage and would transport us to the airport for our flight home. We had been given printed instructions in Spanish to the address and a simple diagrammatic map to give to the taxi driver. This plan floundered as the driver did not read and could not understand a map.

Paul Seligman, S Glam

Far from the crowds

Get away from the madding crowd in Pumamarca, a deserted Inca fortress three miles northeast of Ollantaytambo. A footpath runs on the northern side of the beautiful Patacancha Valley through abandoned agricultural terraces.

In Cuzco the Ayllu, a café popular with locals, is good for cake and hot chocolate. It has two branches, in Almagro and Marquez. Or perhaps have a glass of orange juice or banana milkshake in San Pedro market. On Sunday mornings the nuns sell delicious cakes from the doorway of Santa Catalina convent.

On the road to Lake Titicaca, many visit Andahuaylillas (famous for its church), but few people stay. Try the peaceful Casa del Sol (084 227264), also the local clinic.

In Puno, a tricycle taxi is a cheap thrill. The best place to stay is the Yavari, the oldest steamship on Lake Titicaca (yavari.org), which provides bed (well bunk), breakfast and amazing views.

David Andrews, Peterborough



What to avoid

Altitude sickness

Altitude sickness can ruin a holiday so I recommend the following. Avoid flying into Cuzco from sea level, as many tours do. We booked with Cox and Kings and from Lima flew to Arequipa, then travelled by road to Colca Canyon and Lake Titicaca, gradually increasing altitude, and arriving in Cuzco (higher than Machu Picchu) a week later. We thus became acclimatised as we went. It is also important to keep hydrated, wear a hat in hot sun and avoid alcohol to enjoy properly the spectacle of Machu Picchu, Lake Titicaca, Cuzco and other high-altitude areas in Peru.

Orissa Fogden, address withheld

The Lares Trek

Machu Picchu is top of any tourist's list when visiting Peru, and one of the most popular ways to get there is by hiking the Inca Trail. However, perhaps avoid this in favour of the "Lares Trek", arguably a more spectacular and enjoyable hike into the Sacred Valley.

While travellers on the Inca Trail will experience a higher frequency of tourist traffic, the only souls you encounter along the spectacular sweeping valleys of the Lares Trek are Andean farmers and cheeky llamas or alpacas.

Subsequently, getting the bus up to Machu Picchu instead of hiking also means you are free to arrive as early as you can (be prepared to queue as early as 3am, though), allowing plenty of time to see the sun rise and hike up the unmissable Huayna Picchu.

Robert Joyce, London