



# Unique Peru Experiences to Try Once

FOR A SMALL COUNTRY, PERU PACKS A PUNCH WITH LOADS OF INTERESTING ATTRACTIONS



Leigh McAdam · Last updated: May 4, 2024 · 14 min read



## Table of Contents



Have you dreamed of traveling to Peru, a South American country famous for its diverse landscapes, and one-of-a-kind experiences? Peru

packs a punch for a country that is just five times the size of the United Kingdom. It's a nature lover's dream destination with over 1,800 bird species, 500 mammal species and an astounding 3,700 butterfly species. It's home to ancient archeological sites, including world renown Machu Picchu, Choquequiraro, and the Nazca Lines to name but a few. For more unique Peru experiences look to the worlds highest sand dunes and deepest canyons along with one of the driest deserts on the planet, the Andes Mountains, the Amazon River and Lake Titicaca, the world's highest lake.

With so many unique Peru experiences, this is one country I think every nature lover, hiker, explorer, adventurer, archeologist, and photographer will enjoy visiting.

I have been twice. The first time, John and I did a two week, self-supported trek through the magnificent Cordillera Blanca mountains to the Alpamayo basecamp, and the second, the high altitude **Choquequirao trek** to Machu Picchu.

I have unfinished business in the country and would love to visit every one of the unique Peru destinations described below.

## Location map of unique Peru experiences

## 10 Unique Places to See in Peru | HikeBikeTravel ☆

This map was made with Google My Maps. [Create your own.](#)



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### **Cordillera Blanca and Cordillera Huayhuash in Peru**

The Cordillera Blanca is part of the Andes mountain range that is easily accessible from the town of Huaraz, about a seven hour drive north of Lima.

Many of the peaks in the range are over 6,000 m and much of the trekking is done between altitudes of 3,657 m – 4,572 m (12,000- 15,000 feet). The Cordillera Huayhuash is the neighbouring mountain range and it too is accessed from Huaraz. (Remember the book **Touching the**

**Void** by Joe Simpson? His misadventure took place in the Cordillera Huayhuash.)

There are several famous treks in the two mountain ranges. The Huayhuash trek is a tough 8 – 12-day adventure whereas, the 3-4 day Santa Cruz hike is easier. We did most of what is called the Alpamayo Circuit, getting close to Alpamayo, called the most beautiful mountain in the world by Alpinismus Magazine back in 1966.

On any of the hikes in the area, whether it's a day hike or a multi-day adventure, you are going to be in for a treat.

Mountain landscapes are like no other I have experienced in the world. Picture deep indigo-blue and stunning, turquoise-coloured lakes, tall grasses, and colourful wildflowers, along with take-your-breath-away snow-covered peaks. And best of all, this area is not overrun with tourists!





The beautiful and fertile Sacred Valley in Peru



Indigenous women hard at work at the Caccacollo Women's Weaving Co-op

## Laguna Humantay

Show me a picture of a lake as beautiful at glacial Laguna Humantay and I want to see it for myself. This is another day trip that can be done from Cusco.

It's a three hour drive each way, but the hike itself is just 1.5 hours return. While tours are offered, I would prefer a private taxi timed to arrive when the tours are departing so I had a high probability of having the lake all to myself. This is my idea of paradise – and a totally unique Peru experience.

Humantay Lake is at altitude – 5427 m or 13,900 feet to be exact. When you visit, be sure to drink lots of water and have Advil at your disposal.



Laguna Humanta – Photo credit: Enrique Nordt /PROMPERÚ

## Paracas National Reserve and the Islas Ballestas

Just a four hour drive south of Lima sits Paracas National Reserve, Peru's only marine protected area. The reserve is one of the stops on the bird migration and part of the reason that upwards of 200 species of birds, can be seen here – depending of course on the time of year you visit.

The reserve is also a place of great beauty – cue the sand dunes, part of the driest desert in the world contrasted with the rich blue of the Pacific Ocean. There are many stunning beaches, though most aren't safe for swimming.



The stunning beaches and dunes of Paracas – Photo credit: Skyshot/ PROMPERÚ



Exploring the coastal desert of the Paracas National Reserve – Photo credit: Marco Garro/PROMPERÚ

**Islas Ballestas** is an archipelago of islands that's part of the reserve. It is peppered with tunnels, arches and rock carved by the wind and sea that are typically visited as part of a 2.5-hour boat tour.

The islands are home to abundant wildlife including Humboldt penguins, sea lions, seals, sea turtles, albatross, pelicans and lots of seabirds.





Interesting rocks and lots of wildlife to be seen on Islas Ballestas – Photo credit: Gihan Tubbeh /PROMPERÚ



The Inca Tern seen on las Islas Ballestas – Photo credit: Gihan Tubbeh /PROMPERÚ

Seabirds galore in Paracas National Reserve – Photo credit: Alex Bryce/ PROMPERÚ

## **Nazca Lines – a UNESCO site and a sight unique to Peru**

I've heard about the Nazca Lines, a UNESCO site, for years and have always wanted to see them.

The designs called geoglyphs were carved or etched into the subsoil primarily between 200 – 700 AD. Most of the geoglyphs represent animals. The lines span an area of some 80 km and are best seen from the air in a small plane, typically out of Nazca, about a 7 hour drive south of Lima.

Unique Peru experiences would be seeing the amazing Nazca Lines – Photo credit: Heinz Plenge Pardo/ PROMPERÚ

## **Unique Peru experiences – Vinicunca, the Mountain of Seven Colours**

Vinicunca – called Rainbow Mountain or the Mountain of Seven Colours was discovered in 2015 when snow and ice melted to reveal thick layers of mineral deposits over sandstone rock.

Stripes of gold, red, turquoise, and lavender minerals turned out to be highly Instagrammable and part of the reason for the area's sudden fame. On bluebird days, the mountains really are incredible – but whoever visits must temper their expectations as often the mountains are shrouded in low cloud.

The trip to Vinicunca is done out of Cusco. I ran out of time to do it when I was there, but one person in our hiking group had booked the trip. You leave early in the morning and don't get back until 7 PM as it's about a four hour drive each way.



Go for a walk on a rainbow in Peru – Photo credit: atthree23 from Pixabay

## **Huacachina – a desert oasis town in Peru**

Huacachina is a desert oasis town, located just 10 minutes from the city of Ica in the southern part of Peru.

The unique, mostly touristy town in Peru is popular as a stopping point to see the Nazca Lines. While I don't normally love these sorts of towns, I am a big fan of experiencing the sand dunes.

I'm too much of a wimp to try a dune buggy tour, but my hope is that someone would drive me out to some of the tallest dunes so I could wander aimlessly for an hour at sunset. That is my idea of bliss. And then come back and enjoy one of Peru's famous pisco sours.

For the rest of you, enjoy the thrills of sandboarding – and associated face plants along with a stomach flipping ride in a dune buggy.



The desert oasis of Huacachina – Photo credit: Skyspot/PROMPERÚ

## A Once in a Lifetime Unique Peru Trip to the Amazon

If geography isn't your strong point, you might not appreciate that the Amazon River originates in Peru's Andes Mountains. In fact, more than 60% of the country is covered by the Amazon rainforest. Approximately 11% of the length of the Amazon River flows through Peru – and I for one would like to see it.

However, this is one part of unique Peru where I would want the luxury experience.

The Amazon rainforest is home to the most diverse collection of plant and animal life – along with more than its fair share of reptiles, amphibians and insects. Hence the reason I'm after a luxurious experience.

**Aqua Expeditions** runs cruises that average five days. Onboard are naturalists to pick out the birds and animals you would otherwise miss. And with smaller motorboats and canoes, there are opportunities to get

even closer to nature. This is the way I envision experiencing the Amazon, a once in a lifetime experience for sure!



Exploring the Amazon on a luxury boat with Aqua Expeditions – Photo credit courtesy of Aqua Expeditions

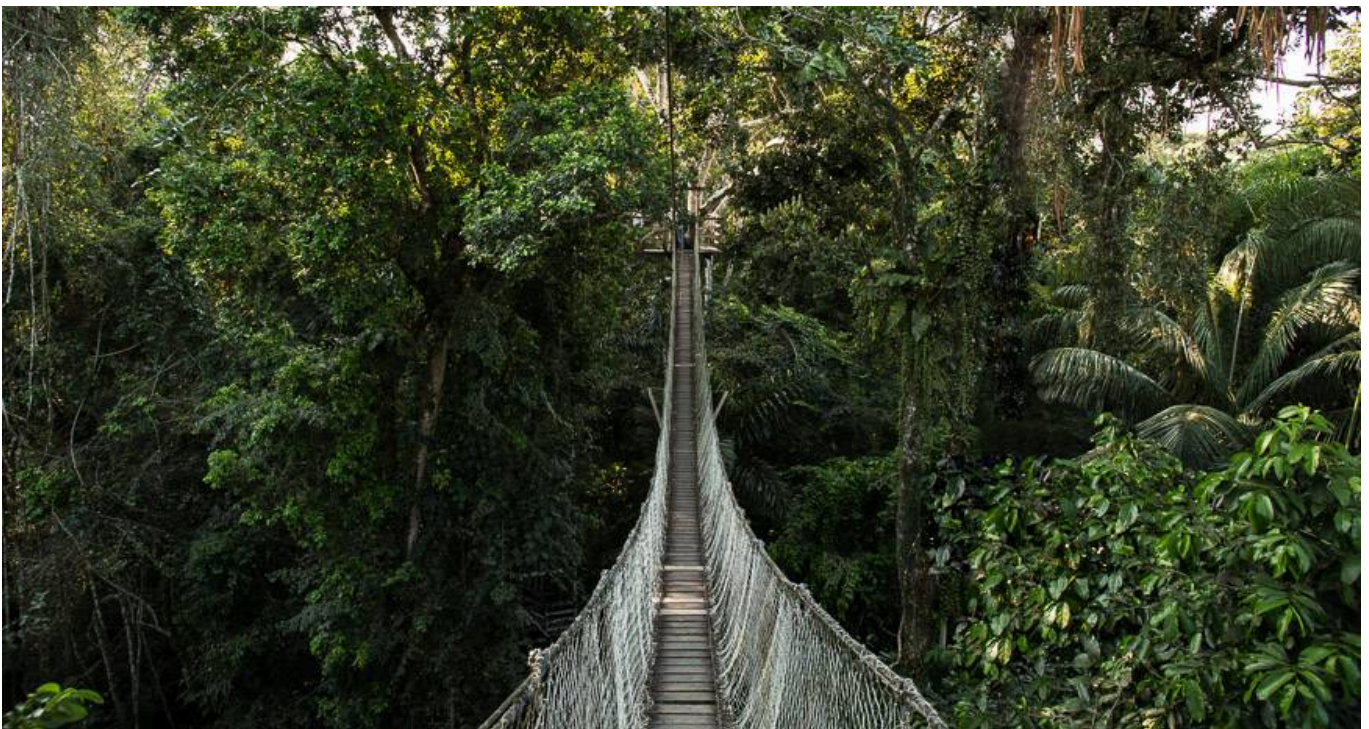
I would also be open to staying in well-appointed jungle lodges like those run by **Inkaterra**.

Pictured below is one of 35 wooden cabanas at **Inkaterra Reserva Amazonica**. The lodge was named by National Geographic in 2013 as one of the top 25 eco-lodges in the world. It's easily accessible from Cusco via a 25-minute flight.

The lodge is in the southern Peru rainforest region considered the biodiversity capital of Peru and next door to the Tambopata National Reserve. An incredible 540 species of bird species have been seen on the grounds here – enough to keep my birder husband happy for days.



Inkaterra cabins in sight of the Madre de Dios River – Photo credit: Inkaterra



Inkaterra Canopy Walkway – 30 m above the ground – Photo credit: Inkaterra

Another unique Peru option is the **Inkaterra Hacienda Concepción** located in the heart of the Amazon on 819 acres of rainforest between the Tambopata National Reserve and the shores of the Madre de Dios River.

A stay here offers a chance to see giant river otters, caimans, and howler monkeys.



A cabana on stilts at Inkaterra Hacienda Concepción – Photo credit: Inkaterra

Here's to turning our travel dreams into reality.

Thank you to **PromPerú** for making this post possible – and to keeping travel dreams alive.

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### Leigh McAdam [↗](#)

Leigh McAdam is an award-winning photographer and three-time author. A true adventurer, Leigh prefers wilderness experiences, camping and glamping in unique locations, long hikes, multi-day bike rides and paddling trips where few people go. In winter, cross-country skiing and snowshoeing are her passion. Author of **Discover Canada: 100 Inspiring Outdoor Adventures** Co-author of **200 Nature Hot Spots in Alberta**

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