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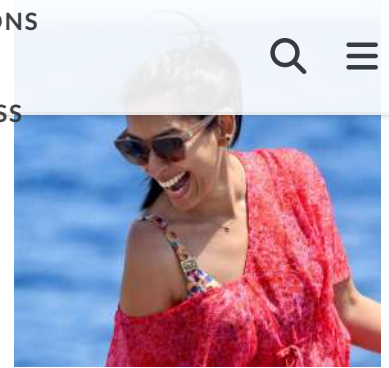
BEST THINGS TO DO IN PERU | A RESPONSIBLE TRAVEL GUIDE

Situated in Western South America, Peru is one of my bucket-list countries. With its world-famous cuisine, dramatic

ABOUT ME

Its name is said to be derived from a Quechua word meaning “land of abundance”. In Peru, that abundance manifests itself in plentiful sights and generous reserves of natural resources – plus, the world’s largest population of Llamas.

Read on to discover the best things to do in Peru, South America. I also cover the best time to visit, sustainable travel tips, and accommodation recommendations.



I'm Sima, join me as I explore, experience and eat my way around the globe. Inspiring you to escape the everyday through my adventures...

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Sima

LET'S BE SOCIAL



HOW TO BE A SUSTAINABLE TRAVELLER, NOT A TOURIST, IN PERU

There are so many things to see in Peru that you could easily spend weeks here. This explains why the country attracted an average of three million yearly visitors in the past decade. But, this tourism has not always benefited local communities.

Responsible tour operators, like G Adventures and Planaterra, have led the way in empowering small local communities. Through local initiatives and tours, these companies help communities that otherwise would not have benefited from the country’s tourism market. These initiatives focus on helping locals provide enriching

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Here's a quick summary of some key ways you can travel more sustainably:

- **Support female-owned businesses:** This is especially important in countries where it's almost impossible to be a working woman.
- **Stay with the locals:** Ditch the hotel for a more genuine experience by staying with the locals.
- **Shop local:** Help communities thrive by supporting small local businesses and markets.
- **Eat local:** Not only does this support local farmers and chefs, but it also benefits the environment. Peru is known for its incredible food, so take your palette on an adventure!
- **Engage with the local culture:** Get to know the locals and learn about their incredible traditional and cultural practices.
- **Use tour operators who work with local communities:** Support tour operators who have a direct interest in uplifting the communities they operate in. You can also support reputable local tour hosts directly.

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AWARDS & RANKING



HOW TO GET TO PERU

Most international flights will land at Lima’s Jorge Chavez International Airport. From London Heathrow, the flight lasts around 16 hours. If you’re flying in from the US, your flight should take around 8 hours.

Once landed in Lima, you’ll need to transfer to your destination city by vehicle or domestic flight. Cusco is about an hour’s flight from Lima.

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WHAT TO DO IN PERU | SUSTAINABLE ACTIVITIES & ATTRACTIONS

YOUTUBE

Responsible travel provides locals with sustainable income while providing you with a more authentic experience of the country’s people, culture, and history. Let’s explore how you can explore Peru’s famous landmarks while giving back to local communities.

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EXPLORE CUSCO CITY

Valley. It's a great place to learn more about the history of the Incas.

This Peruvian city in the Andes was once the capital of the famous Inca Empire which thrived between 1400 and 1533 CE. This empire was the world's largest at the time, and the Incas left behind a legacy of artistic and architectural wonders.



This city is one of the highest in the world, situated over 11,000 feet above sea level. Cusco is actually higher than Machu Picchu, so many travellers visit this city first to acclimatise to the altitude.

With its winding cobblestoned streets and 360°-views of the Andean mountains, this city is a photographer's dream. Go people-watching in Plaza de Armas and admire the intricate Cusco Cathedral, which took almost a century to build. You can also learn more about Peruvian and Inca history at nearby ruins and museums. [Visit the Sacsayhuamán ruins](#) overlooking Cusco or stop by the Inka Museum or the Museum of Pre-Columbian Art (MAP).

and drink plenty of coca tea.

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VISIT THE CCACCACCOLLO COMMUNITY

Located about half an hour's drive from Cusco, the Ccacacallo women's weaving co-op is a Planaterra-supported community run by women.

Cusco saw a major boom in tourism from the late 1990s. The increase in tourism correlated with the increase in luxury hotels and restaurants, which locals often could not compete with. However, the start of this weaving co-operative in 2005 changed this.



Today, it is owned by 46 women who are able to earn a living while maintaining their traditional way of life. This has also allowed the women to preserve and pass on the art of centuries-old weaving techniques.

We learned about the traditional hand-weaving methods and the natural elements used to dye the yarn. These include the *qolle* plant and *cochinilla* insects. We also got to hear directly from the locals how the initiative has enriched their lives. They sell beautiful alpaca clothing – great for stocking up on

STAY WITH THE LOCALS

Due to the community's success, they also run a homestay, allowing you to wake up in the beautiful Sacred Valley. This is a great opportunity to further support the community and spend more time getting to know the locals.

LEARN ABOUT POTATO CULTIVATION AT PARQUE DE LA PAPA



If you're a potato lover like me, you'll adore [Parque de La Papa](#) (or Potato Park). Five local communities near Cusco work to cultivate and preserve over 1,300 native potato varieties that grow in the Andes.

The community uses traditional cultivation methods and works alongside the Svalbard Global Seed Vault to preserve the many potato varieties. Their work has been recognised by the Peruvian government, who has designated the park an Agrobiodiversity zone.

There's plenty to do here, including birdwatching, guided hikes, hands-on workshops, and immersive experiences.

Of course, you can also sample some of the potato varieties and other fresh goodies in delicious food tastings. You can even try a tasty papa sour – a pisco sour made from potatoes.

SUPPORT THE CUYO CHUCO COMMUNITY



The Cuyo Chuco Community was once known for their ceramic craftwork from which they earned an income. But, with the introduction of cheaper materials and plastic, the community saw a decrease in demand. This led to 12 local families coming together to start the Tinkuy Tourism Community.

With the help of Planeterra, the community was able to develop traveller-friendly cultural and gastronomy experiences. On your visit, you can learn about traditional ceramic techniques through a pottery-making demonstration and even paint your own item. We also got to make our own empanadas.

initiatives focused on local clean-ups and road access improvements to benefit others living in Cuyo Chuco.

HIKE THE LARES TREK



Most tourists make their way to Machu Picchu via the famous Inca Trail. Very few people know that there's a less crowded yet equally scenic alternative — the [Lares Trek hike](#). This trail is just over 20 miles long and usually takes around 3–4 days to complete. We did a shortened version of the hike, which only took about 1.5 days.

Reaching over 14,000 feet at its highest point, this trail is not for the faint of heart. Due to the altitude, there were times when it felt like my heart was beating out of my chest. But, the stunning views of the dramatic landscape are absolutely worth it. We also met some kind locals and cute llamas along the way.



There are many campsites along the Lares trail, often run by small communities. We spent the night in the Cuncani Community Campsite, complete with hot water bottles, added amenities, and treats. If you choose to do the full hike, you'll end up in Aguas Calientes on day three. This town sits at the foot of Machu Picchu. From there, Machu Picchu is only about a 30-minute bus ride or two-hour hike away.

Note: *Remember to leave no trace behind. Ensure you leave the trail as you found it and take all litter or food waste with you.*



HIKE TO HUCHUY QOSQO

Cusco," was built between 1000 and 1400 AD. It is one of the Sacred Valley's lesser-known landmarks and can only be accessed on foot.

Huchuy Qosqo sits at an altitude of over 11,000 feet and can be reached on a roughly 12-mile hike. We opted to do the Lares Trek instead due to weather conditions. But the Huchuy Qosqo hiking trail is a great alternative if you're looking to go off the beaten path. You'll pass by drastically different landscapes, ranging from arid bush to lush vegetation and waterfalls.

After a few hours, you'll reach the incredibly well-preserved archaeological site on a plateau among the mountains. The ruins provide great insight into how the Incas lived and you'll enjoy sweeping views across the valley and Lamay.

STOP BY PARWA COMMUNITY RESTAURANT

A challenging hike deserves a rewarding meal, and the Parwa Community Restaurant provides just that. This restaurant sits along the roughly two-hour descent from the Huchuy Qosqo site. Here over 40 locals work to serve delicious meals prepared from organic ingredients sourced straight from the garden.

EXPLORE AGUAS CALIENTES



Aguas Calientes is the gateway town to Machu Picchu and lies in a deep gorge below the ruins. Its name means “hot waters” in Spanish and refers to the abundance of thermal springs found here. To reach this town, you can take the train from Poroy or Ollantaytambo near Cusco. The scenic train ride lasts about 1.5 hours.

Many people simply pass through Aguas Calientes. But if you have time to spare, there’s plenty to see and do here. Wander about town to see stunning wall art and Inca-themed statues. There are also some iconic Machu Picchu signs for that Insta-worthy photo opportunity.

Head to the Mariposario of Machu Picchu, a beautiful butterfly sanctuary that has been operating for over five decades. You’ll see all sorts of indigenous butterflies and birds, and there’s a small on-site café.

End your explorations with Peruvian craft beer at spots like Mapacho Craft Beer Restaurant or Chullos Restaurant and Craft Beer.

VISIT MACHU PICCHU



From Aguas Calientes, we took a bus to Machu Picchu via the winding Hiram Bingham highway. The highway is named for the archaeologist and explorer who initiated the study of this archaeological site. He was led to Machu Picchu by a local farmer in 1911. At the time, only the local villages were aware of the ruins.

When we arrived, it was quite cloudy. But, by the end of our walk to the Machu Picchu viewpoint, the clouds magically cleared, revealing the iconic landmark.



There are many stand-out structures here that showcase the engineering and architectural skills of the Incas. They were particularly skilled at dry stone masonry – fitting stone together without mortar. Some standouts include The Temple of the Three Windows and The Temple of the Sun.

Tip: *Get the most out of your visit by getting a combined Machu Picchu ticket with a bus trip and guide.*

BUY ARTISAN GOODS AT LOCAL MARKETS

You won't find any modern shopping centres in Cusco, but there are plenty of artisan craft markets. These vibrant hubs are perfect for seeking out the perfect memento or gift to take home. When in Peru, don't overlook the alpaca clothing!

You can also look out for hiking essentials like wooden hiking poles and warm clothing for those high altitudes.



Here are some of the great markets to consider:

- **San Pedro Market:** Located in downtown Cusco, this bustling market sells everything from street food and fresh produce to alpaca clothing.
- **Mercado Artesanal de Cusco:** This small market in Cusco is the perfect stop for some gift shopping and is less busy than some of the larger markets.

beautifully handcrafted goods.

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- **Urubamba Market:** Stop by this farmer’s market in the Sacred Valley for fresh seasonal produce grown in the region.
- **Pisac Market:** One of the more popular choices, this Sunday market is filled with colourful stalls selling fresh produce and craft goods.
- **Ollantaytambo Market:** Also known as “Mercado Artesanal,” this handicraft market sits at the entrance to the Ollantaytambo archaeological site.

Tip: Practise your haggling skills before you go. Negotiation is part of the traditional market experience in Peru. Generally, haggling does not apply to fresh produce and street food, but souvenirs may have a more flexible price.

WHERE TO STAY IN PERU

There are plenty of great places to stay in Peru. I’ve listed some hand-picked options in and around Cusco for every budget.

BUDGET | NAO VICTORIA HOSTEL



interiors feature beautiful frescoes and architecture with a modern touch. Expect comfy beds, excellent service, and a delicious complimentary breakfast.

[Check Availability & Book](#)

MID-RANGE | HILTON GARDEN INN CUSCO



The Hilton Garden Inn features all the classic comforts of a modern hotel. Enjoy contemporary rooms accentuated with deep red hues and lovely views. You can fuel up for your adventures at the on-site restaurant or explore the excellent nearby restaurants. After your hike, retreat to the spa for a much-needed massage.

[Check Availability & Book](#)

LUXURY | INKATERRA HACIENDA URUBAMBA



Located just over an hour's drive from Cusco, the 5-star Inkaterra Hacienda in Urubamba offers an idyllic escape from the city bustle. The interiors highlight Peruvian hand-crafted items and large windows allow plenty of light to stream in. You'll get to savour delicious meals at the on-site restaurant prepared from produce grown in the hotel's very own garden.

Check Availability & Book

ACTIVITIES TO DO IN PERU: FAQs

Still have a few questions while planning your Peru trip? Have a look at my answers to frequently asked questions.

WHAT IS THE BEST TIME TO VISIT PERU?

The best time to visit Peru is between May and October — known as the dry season. Peru is a tropical country, with its northern tip nearly touching the equator. Summer sees plenty of rain, while the winter is much drier. This makes it more ideal if your itinerary includes hikes or camping.

IS A WEEK IN PERU LONG ENOUGH?

many activities and places to visit in Peru that you can easily spend more than a week exploring Peru.



IS PERU EXPENSIVE TO TRAVEL THROUGH?

Peru is one of the more cost-effective countries to travel to. You can have a great time here whether on a budget or splurging on some luxury living. For budget travellers, there are hikes galore, markets selling fresh produce, and public transport options. Hostels and camps also tend to be very affordable.

WHAT IS THE BEST CITY FOR TRAVELLERS TO STAY IN PERU?

If you're looking to immerse yourself in the history and culture of Peru, Cusco City is a great option. This ancient city is near some of Peru's top tourist attractions and hiking trails and boasts plenty of markets. There are also countless great community initiatives taking place in and around Cusco that you can support.

PERU

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Peru is undoubtedly a stellar country, with its vibrant culture and traditions still ever-present and alive today. Its diverse landscapes make Peru a dream for wanderers. While the vibrant markets and well-preserved ruins are perfect for eager photographers. And, if you're after some cultural insight and experiences, Peru has plenty of that in store, too. Add a touch of Peruvian hospitality and you're in for the adventure of a lifetime.

I hope this post has inspired you to explore Peru in more sustainable ways. While tourism can do a country a lot of good, it can also harm the livelihoods of local communities. Taking a more conscious and responsible approach to travel will not only enrich the locals' lives but your own experience of Peru.

If you're looking for more South American countries to visit, have a look at my [two-week Colombia itinerary](#). This country is home to equally vibrant and culturally rich cities. Explore [the city of Cartagena](#) or the countless fun things to do in



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