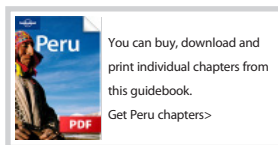


Getting Started



Peru has it all. Mystical archaeological sites, amazing Amazonian rainforest, the world's highest tropical mountains and an endless desert coastline will keep you traveling for months. Diverse and welcoming peoples, even more varied wildlife and some of the continent's gutsiest food all await adventurers. Best of all, transportation is efficient and relatively inexpensive, and accommodations are available to suit every budget, from cheapie backpackers hostels to beautifully converted colonial mansions.

This chapter will help you know when to go to Peru, what to pack, how much you'll spend while you're there and which places you won't want to miss visiting.

WHEN TO GO

Peru's climate has two main seasons – wet and dry – though the weather varies greatly depending on the geographical region. Temperature is mostly influenced by elevation: the higher you climb, the cooler it becomes.

The peak tourist season is from June to August, which coincides with the cooler dry season in the Andean highlands and summer vacation in North America and Europe. This is the best (and busiest) time to go trekking on the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu, or climbing, hiking and mountain biking elsewhere.

People can and do visit the highlands year-round, though the wettest months of December to March make it a wet and muddy proposition. Many of the major fiestas (see p504), such as La Virgen de la Candelaria, Carnaval and Semana Santa, occur in the wettest months and continue undiminished even during heavy rainstorms.

On the arid coast, Peruvians visit the beaches during the most hot and humid time of the year, from late December through March. In central

A Peruvian weather site, in Spanish, is www.senamhi.gob.pe.

DON'T LEAVE HOME WITHOUT...

n and, if necessary, a visa (p513).	A passport valid for six months beyond your trip
n sure any prior vaccinations are up-to-date before setting off.	All recommended immunizations (p529) – make
n (p506).	A copy of your travel insurance policy details
n PIN (p507).	An ATM or traveler's-check card with a four-digit
n better yet, plan to take an alternative route (p277).	Reservations for trekking the Inca Trail (p274) – or
n – it'll shield you from the sun, and keep you dry when it rains.	A lightweight, wind-resistant and rainproof jacket
n enjoy ear-splitting entertainment at all hours.	Earplugs – long-distance buses and many hotels

and southern Peru, the coast is cloaked in *garúa* (coastal fog) for the rest of the year. Although the southern beaches are deserted then, the coastal cities can be visited at any time. In the north, the coast usually sees more sun, so beach lovers can hang out there year-round.

In the eastern rainforest, of course, it rains. The wettest months are December through May, but even then it rarely rains for more than a few hours at a time, so there's still plenty of sunshine to enjoy. Follow the locals' example: briefly take cover during the heaviest downpours. It's not a big deal.

COSTS & MONEY

Shoestring travelers watching their céntimos – by sleeping in dormitory rooms, traveling on economy buses, eating set menus – can easily get by on US\$20 to US\$25 a day, and even less if frugality is one of their strong points. Visitors who prefer private hot showers, à la carte meals in moderately priced restaurants, comfortable buses and occasional flights will find that US\$35 to US\$75 a day should meet their needs. Staying at luxury hotels and dining at top-end restaurants can cost up to several hundred dollars a day, especially if you're doing your trip by organized tour (see p520) or visiting only the most expensive cities of Cuzco and Lima.

You can stretch your budget by traveling with a partner as double rooms are usually less expensive than two singles (see p496). Hone your bargaining skills – taxi cabs don't have meters, and drivers routinely overcharge gringos. Hotels often give discounts if you simply ask for their 'best price,' or if you inquire about promotional, student or business rates. Many restaurants offer filling three-course set lunches for around S/5 (about US\$1.50), while eating à la carte will triple your bill. Pay with cash rather than credit cards, in order to avoid hefty surcharges. Peruvian ATMs dispense both local currency (nuevos soles) and US dollars. Above all, keep your money safely stashed – an economical trip can get expensive fast if you are pickpocketed! For tips on avoiding theft, see p501.

Adventurers on a tight budget will be dismayed at the high costs of hiking the famed Inca Trail to Machu Picchu. Unguided trips are now illegal (and this is strictly enforced) and the cheapest four-day trips start around US\$300 per person, not including equipment rental, tips for the guides and porters, or any incidental expenses, such as bottled water. A day trip to Machu Picchu via train and bus isn't cheap either (see p253 and p274).

For exchange rates, see the inside front cover of this book. For more advice on ATMs, currency exchange, traveler's checks, taxes and tipping, see p507.

TRAVEL LITERATURE

Inca Land: Explorations in the Highlands of Peru, by Hiram Bingham, is the classic traveler's tale. The book was first published in 1922, just over a decade after the American author 're-discovered' the ancient Inca citadel of Machu Picchu.

Eight Feet in the Andes: Travels with a Donkey from Ecuador to Cuzco, by Dervla Murphy, is an insightful, witty travelogue of this peripatetic travel writer's 1300-mile journey with her daughter through remote regions, ending at Machu Picchu.

The White Rock: An Exploration of the Inca Heartland, by Hugh Thomson, describes a filmmaker's search for hidden archaeological sites

See Climate Charts (p499) for more information.

HOW MUCH?

Local phone call US\$0.15

Short taxi ride (not in Lima) US\$1

Internet café per hour US\$0.60

Two-star hotel room with bathroom and TV US\$20

Flight between most cities US\$95

See also the Lonely Planet Index, inside front cover.

TOP TENS**Festivals & Events**

From colorful religious processions to Inca festivals in the Andean highlands, Peru's fiestas go off year-round. The following are just a few of our favorites.

- | | |
|---|---|
| n | Virgen de la Candelaria (p504) – highland folk music and dance celebrations on February 2 |
| n | Carnaval (p504) – water fights and highland fiestas before the start of Lent |
| n | Semana Santa (p504) – spectacular pageantry during Holy Week |
| n | Q'oyoriti (p284) – Andean mountain worship and spiritual pilgrimages in May/June |
| n | Inti Raymi (p239) – ancient Inca festival of the sun held on June 24 |
| n | Fiestas Patrias (p504) – Peru's festive National Independence Days on July 28–29 |
| n | Feast of Santa Rosa de Lima (p504) – honoring the patron saint of the Americas on August 30 |
| n | El Señor de los Milagros (p107) – on October 18, with religious processions bedecked in purple, plus bullfights |
| n | Día de los Muertos (p505) – food, drink and flowers taken to family graves on November 2 |
| n | Puno Week (p196) – starting on November 5, among the Americas' best folkloric celebrations |

Outdoor Adventures

throughout the Peruvian Andes and Bolivia. It includes a lot of back-ground on earlier travelers and explorers.

The Peru Reader: History, Culture, Politics, edited by Orin Starn, Carlos Ivan Degregori and Robin Kirk, is a literary and journalistic look at everything from the conquest of the Incas to cocaine production, guerrilla warfare and gay activism.

At Play in the Fields of the Lord, by Peter Matthiessen, is a classic, superb and believable novel about the conflicts between the forces of 'development' and indigenous peoples in the Amazon jungle.

Trail of Feathers: In Search of the Birdmen of Peru, by Tahir Shah, is an amusing tall tale about what lies behind the 'birdmen' legends of the Peruvian desert, eventually leading the author to a tribe of cannibals in the Amazon.

Cut Stones and Crossroads: A Journey in the Two Worlds of Peru, by Ronald Wright, is a comprehensive journey through some of Peru's ancient cities and archaeological sites, and it comes with helpful guides to Quechua terminology and traditional Andean music.

INTERNET RESOURCES

For many more websites targeted to specific topics, such as volunteering in Peru or gay and lesbian travel, thumb through the Directory at the back of this book, starting on p496.

From Andean highlands to Amazon rainforests to arid coastal deserts, Peru is an all-seasons playground. See p60 for an insider's guide to outdoor adventures. For Peru's top national parks, wildlife reserves and natural areas, turn to p56.

- | | |
|---|---|
| n | Trekking to Machu Picchu (p274) – deservedly world-famous trails to ancient Inca ruins |
| n | Trekking the Ausangate Circuit (p283) – six days of high-altitude trekking alongside alpacas |
| n | Mountaineering around Huaraz (p377) – experts can scale Peru's highest peak, Huascarán (6768m) |
| n | Trekking in the Cordilleras Blanca and Huayhuash (p385) – prime tramping past scores of glaciated peaks |
| n | River running (white-water rafting) on the Río Tambopata (p236) and the rivers around Arequipa (p171) – multiday Andes-to-Amazon descents or through deep canyons |
| n | Mountain biking around Arequipa (p172) and the Cordillera Blanca (p378) – easy trails and demanding single-track await |
| n | Trekking in the Cañóns del Colca and Cotahuasi (p181 and p186) – get down into the world's deepest canyons |
| n | Reaching remote archaeological sites from Chachapoyas (p438) – hire a guide, machete and pack mule to thrash through cloud forest |
| n | Sandboarding at Huacachina (p142) – slide down humungous dunes at a desert oasis |
| n | Surfing on the north coast (p340) – adventurers don't stop at 10! |

Weird, Wacky & Wonderful

Andean Travel Web (www.andeantravelweb.com/peru) Independent travel directory with loads of links to hotels, tour companies, volunteer programs etc.

Latin America Network Information Center (www.lanic.utexas.edu) The University of Texas provides hundreds of informative links on all subjects.

Living in Peru (www.livinginperu.com) This English-speaking expats' guide is an excellent source of local (albeit Lima-centric) news, plus an events calendar.

Peru Links (www.perulinks.com) Thousands of links on a range of topics; many are in Spanish, some in English. Editor's picks and top 10 sites are always good.

PromPerú (www.peru.info) The official government tourism agency, with a good overview of Peru in Spanish, English, French, German, Italian and Portuguese.

Itineraries

CLASSIC ROUTES

THE GRINGO TRAIL

Two Weeks / Lima to Cuzco

Leaving **Lima** (p85), journey south to **Pisco** and **Paracas** (p131), where there are tours to the wildlife-rich **Islas Ballestas** (p132). Then it's on to **Ica** (p137), Peru's wine and pisco (grape brandy) capital, and the palm-fringed oasis of **Huacachina** (p141), famous for sandboarding. Next is **Nazca** (p142) for a flight over the mysterious Nazca Lines.

Turn inland for the 'white city' of **Arequipa** (p162), with its colonial architecture and stylish nightlife. While there, go trekking in **Cañón del Colca** (p181) or **Cañón del Cotahuasi** (p186), the world's deepest, or climb **El Misti** (p170), a breathless 5822m high. Then it's upwards to **Puno** (p193), Peru's port on **Lake Titicaca** (p203), the world's highest navigable lake, where you can visit traditional islands and the *chullpas* (funerary towers) at **Sillustani** (p202) or **Cutimbo** (p202).

Wind through the Andes to **Cuzco** (p221), South America's oldest continuously inhabited city. Browse colorful markets and explore archaeological sites in the **Sacred Valley** (p255), then trek along the **Inca Trail** (p274) to **Machu Picchu** (p269) – or better yet, take a more adventurous alternative route (p277).

This loop starting from Lima, zooming through the coastal desert, up to Lake Titicaca and ending at Machu Picchu, is one of the most popular routes on the continent. You could do much of this route in two weeks, but a meandering month is ideal.



ONLY THE BEST OF PERU

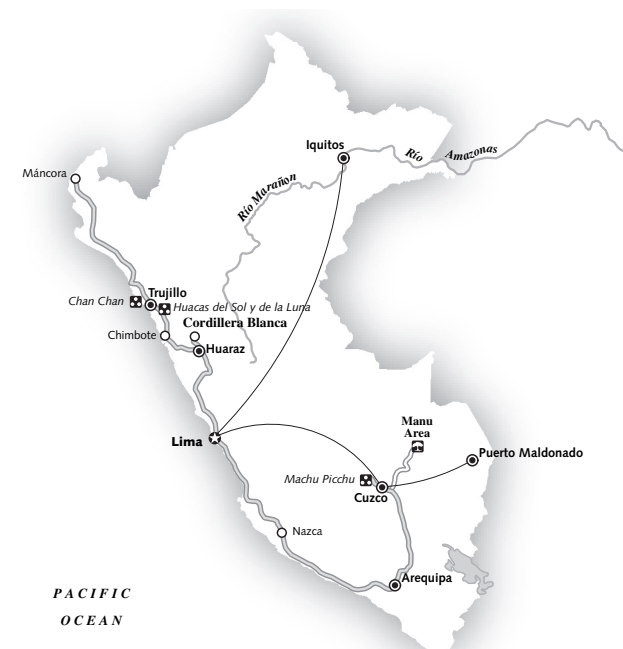
Four Weeks / Lima to Máncora

Overcome your jet lag in **Lima** (p85), Peru's historic capital, then zoom south through the coastal desert for a flyover of the **Nazca Lines** (p145) before arriving in stylish, cosmopolitan **Arequipa** (p162), with its mysterious monasteries, deep canyons and smoking volcanoes. Fly high into the Andes to reach colonial **Cuzco** (p221) for a few days of acclimatization before boarding the train to **Machu Picchu** (p269), the most visited archaeological site in South America.

From Cuzco, fly to **Puerto Maldonado** (p452) to stay at a wildlife lodge along one of the mighty rivers in the Amazon Basin. Alternatively, take an overland tour from Cuzco to the **Manu area** (p465), where a Unesco-listed haven of biodiversity protects the priceless rainforest. Another option for exploring the Amazonian *selva* (jungle) is to first fly back to Lima, then onward to **Iquitos** (p483).

Back in Lima, take a bus northward to the adventurers' base camp of **Huaraz** (p374), where a short trek will take you to the precipitous peaks and languid lakes of the **Cordillera Blanca** (p385). Rumble back down to the coast at **Chimbote** (p326), then dash north to historic **Trujillo** (p328), surrounded by a cornucopia of archaeological sites, including the ruins of the largest pre-Columbian city in the Americas, **Chan Chan** (p336), and the fascinating **Huacas del Sol y de la Luna** (p339). Finish up with a sunny seaside break at the bustling beach resort and surf town of **Máncora** (p362).

Are you the kind of person who has to do it all? This whirlwind tour hits Peru's must-see attractions. Be sure to give yourself a full month if you want to brag that you've really seen it all.



ROADS LESS TRAVELED

NORTH COASTIN'

Three Weeks / Lima to Tumbes

The first stop north of **Lima** (p85) could be **Caral** (p324), where the oldest known civilization in South America arose. Further north is the gruesome site of **Sechín** (p325), although many travelers prefer to continue to **Trujillo** (p328). Nearby attractions include the well-preserved Moche pyramids of **Huacas del Sol y de la Luna** (p339), and the ruins of the once mighty **Chan Chan** (p336).

Off the sleepy beaches at **Huanchaco** (p340), modern surfers paddle out to the breakers alongside local fishers in traditional *totoras* canoes. En route to Chiclayo is **Puerto Chicama** (p343), which boasts one of the world's longest left-hand breaks, attracting international surfers. Then it's **Chiclayo** (p344), with several nearby towns that contain world-class museums showcasing riches from the important archaeological site of **Sipán** (p350).

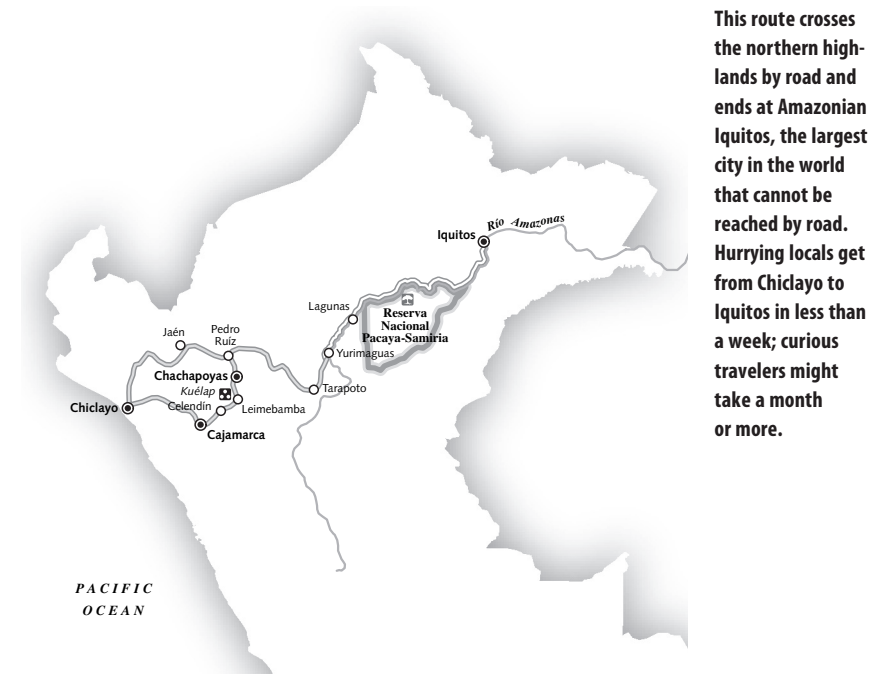
Piura (p353) is a hub for visiting the witch doctors of **Huancabamba** (p359), hidden away in the Andes, or the craft markets and *picanterías* (local restaurants) of dusty **Catacaos** (p357). Peru's best beaches lie along the Pacific shoreline heading further north, and resorts such as **Máncora** (p362) offer lots of places to munch on great seafood and dance the balmy nights away.

The journey ends at **Tumbes** (p367), a gateway to Ecuador. It's the jumping-

Straight as an arrow, the Panamericana Norte passes archaeological sites, great beaches, colonial cities and museums with fascinating artifacts. Hemingway liked it – you will too. Unless you're in a hurry to reach Ecuador, you'll want to spend a minimum of two weeks on your journey.



off point for visiting Peru's only mangrove swamps (watch out for those crocodiles!) and vast tracts of protected forests.



This route crosses the northern highlands by road and ends at Amazonian Iquitos, the largest city in the world that cannot be reached by road. Hurrying locals get from Chiclayo to Iquitos in less than a week; curious travelers might take a month or more.

Snapshot

It's a nation on the brink.

Although known to the outside world for its ancient ruins, Peru is modernizing at a breakneck pace. Where once there were only chicken buses, now comfortable *bus-camas* (bed buses) ply newly paved highways. The construction of an ambitious interoceanic highway and the opening of the new Integration Bridge between Peru and Brazil signals a cross-border trade and travel boom ahead.

In fact, average Peruvians today are economically far better off than they were even just five years ago. Nevertheless, everyday life still consists mostly of chronic poverty and unemployment that's so out of control it can't be reliably measured.

It's hardly surprising, then, that labor strikes for higher wages and political protests happen quite often: farmers march against the US-backed eradication of traditional coca crops, villagers fight environmental pollution by international mining corporations, doctors boycott US trade pacts that would drive up the price of drugs desperately needed to treat HIV/AIDS – the controversies never stop. This unrest can be tiresome for travelers, who may find their trip suddenly delayed. It's not really a big deal to Peruvians, though, who are used to accepting such disturbances as facts of life.

As it tries to exorcise the demons from its political past, Peru is haunted by all-too-familiar ghosts. In 2005, disgraced ex-president Alberto Fujimori returned from exile in Japan and announced that he planned to run for the presidency again, only to be arrested in Chile on an extradition warrant to face charges of corruption and human rights abuses. Peruvians look back with mixed feelings to the days of Fujimori's strongman style of rule (see p37), and his cult of personality lingers on.

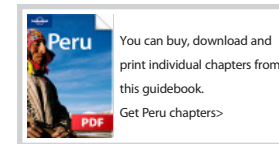
In the 2006 presidential elections, Fujimori was constitutionally banned from appearing on the ballot, so it narrowed to a face-off between the popular nationalist Ollanta Humala, an ex-army officer under Fujimori, and left-leaning Alan García, another ex-president who put Peru on the path to financial ruin during the late 1980s. In the end, Peruvians decided that the devil you know is better than the one you don't, and voted silver-tongued García back into office. Outgoing president Alejandro Toledo may have been the first indigenous president of an Andean nation, but after failing to deliver new jobs and an administration plagued by corruption scandals, Toledo's popularity ratings dropped below 10%, the lowest of any South American president.

Armed attacks along the famous Inca Trail and on trekking routes in the mountains around Huaraz, muggings on overnight buses, terrorist threats against train routes and express kidnappings from taxis don't happen often, but they do happen. Meanwhile, the feared Sendero Luminoso (Shining Path) guerrillas may be making a comeback, thanks to profits from cocaine trafficking with drug cartels in neighboring Colombia (see p501). Such unfortunate events are just as worrying to Peruvians – whose economic success and development depend heavily on tourist dollars – as they are to foreign visitors.

Yet Peru overall is a safer, easier and more insanely popular place to travel than ever before. Thankfully, responsible tourism is finally on the agenda, from Inca Trail porter welfare to sustainable ecotourism in the Amazon to protecting loved-to-death sites such as Machu Picchu and

the Nazca Lines. Every year archaeologists are finding more amazing sites hidden in the cloud forests, desert and jungle, including those built by some of the oldest cultures in the Americas. Peruvians also are reclaiming more of their heritage, with racism against indigenous peoples now recognized as unjust and a debate underway to have Inca artifacts repatriated from Yale University in the USA.

When it comes to Peru, there's always news. Come see its evolution for yourself.



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FAST FACTS

Population: 27.2 million

Median age: 25 years

Peruvians who live in poverty: 54%

Gross Domestic Product (GDP): US\$72 billion

Estimated hectares of coca production: 38,000

Number of taxis in Lima: one in every seven cars

Rate of inflation: 1.6%

Navigable tributaries in the Amazon Basin: 8600km

Average daily visitors to Machu Picchu: 1000

Native varieties of Peruvian potatoes: almost 4000