



## The Road to Lake Titicaca

**TRIP LENGTH:** 10 days

**STARTS:** Cusco, Peru

**ENDS:** La Paz, Bolivia

*Experience one of travel's holy grails: the Altiplano, an austere landscape where the people bring the color and movement with costume, dance, and shy, transfiguring smiles.*

*Swirling flutes and skirts, bowler hats and ponchos, crazy carnivals, counterfeiters, skulls and smugglers... the road from Cusco to La Paz offers the best cultural encounter in South America and is our absolute favorite place to share with our guests.*

*This whole trip takes place over 10,000 feet (3,300m); please acclimatize for at least two days before starting it.*

### Day 1 Tasty treats on the local food trail

The road to Lake Titicaca begins in the *Valle Sur* (South Valley), which happens to be Cusco's favorite gastronomic destination. It's the perfect place to start our transition from the well-trodden Gringo Trail into a less-traveled, more authentic world!

We'll sample local treats including but not limited to: *cuy* (guinea pig), *chicharrones*, *pan chuta*, and fried cheese (just to name Steve's favorites!). Along the way we'll check out pre-Inca ruins, have our fortunes read in coca leaves by a local shaman, and visit pre-Inca ruins and the incredibly elaborate church of Andahuaylillas.

We'll spend the night in village of Raqchi, home to a group of gracious, funny people we're proud to call our friends. This evening we'll join our hosts dancing around a bonfire - a typical evening's entertainment in Raqchi, and the perfect way to bond with new friends!

**Accommodation:** Homestay in Raqchi

**Meals:** Lunch and dinner included (come hungry - this is a very foodie day!)

### Day 2 Local life in Raqchi

Today we'll strike off into the countryside, wandering to breathtaking lookouts, and the nearby (extinct!) volcano of Kimsach'ata. Later we'll try our hand at pottery-making - the people of Raqchi are professional potters and will show us how to make a pot on a pedal-powered potter's wheel.

Later we'll experience an authentic *ch'alla*, or tribute to Pacha Mama - a beloved deity whose identity is a cross between the Virgin Mary and Mother Earth, giving us insight into the very particular version of Catholicism that pervades the high Andes.

**Accommodation:** Homestay in Raqchi

**Meals:** All meals included

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### Day 3 Hike Rainbow Mountain

If you're well acclimatized, you might want to hike up Rainbow Mountain (locally known as Vinicunca) today. Our guide, horse and oxygen tank will be with you through the four hour trek, to make sure you have a safe and enjoyable time reaching this world-famous landmark.

If you feel like taking a way shorter hike (an hour or so, at lower altitude) for a very similar payoff of spectacularly colored mountainsides and views of snowcapped peaks, we'll head for Palcoyo mountain instead.

**Accommodation:** Homestay in Raqchi

**Meals:** All meals included

### Day 4 Welcome to the altiplano!

Raqchi is home to the strangest Inca ruin! Made uncharacteristically of adobe, its erosion has left huge, strangely organic-looking forms dotting the landscape, before heading off into the *altiplano* – one of the highest, and longest, inhabited places on Earth, and home to a plethora of unlikely attractions.

After an hour's drive we'll take the plunge at Marangani: a surreal and improbable complex of five natural hot pools, presided over by a miniature volcano, linked by steaming streams, and populated by locals enjoying the only hot water for miles around.

And we'll spend the night in a historic hacienda. Established as a convent in the 18th century, it's now home to a dairy farm that's been producing some of Peru's best cheese for more than a century. We'll meet the cows, visit the production plant, and try delicious high-altitude cheese and yoghurt, before snuggling down for the night in cosy rooms, surrounded by the freezing, windswept altiplano.

**Accommodation:** Cosy room in a historic hacienda

**Meals:** All meals included

### Day 5 Forgotten riches in Lampa

Lampa, once one of the richest towns in the world, is now all but a ghost town. It's also home to Katy's favorite tourist attraction in the world, a 350 year old church where secret tunnels, a miraculous virgin who refused to leave Lampa, a lifesize model of Da Vinci's Last Supper, and a full-scale reproduction of Michelangelo's *Pietà* are all just the buildup for the creepiest sight in Peru: an internal tower lavishly decorated with human skulls! This is crazy, dark, Catholic South America at its finest, and has to be seen to be believed.

From Lampa we'll drive (1.5 hours) to Puno, a bustling port town on the shores of Lake Titicaca where we'll rejoin the modern era with a memorable dinner at a *novo-andino* (new Andean fusion) restaurant.

**Accommodation:** Four-star hotel in Puno

**Meals:** All meals included

## Day 6 Islands of Lake Titicaca

Our first stop on Lake Titicaca is the well-known oddity of the Uros Islands: better known as the Floating Islands, the islands are man made, woven of totora reeds. We'll learn about the soggy, reed-based life of the Uros people and bounce up and down on the intriguingly spongy 'ground', before heading further across the lake to Amantani Island, where we'll challenge our hosts, members of the indigenous Quechua community, to a game of soccer (which we will certainly lose). Then we'll hike up to the island's summit, in time to watch the world's best sunset over the rippling water, mountainous islands, and crinkly shoreline of Lake Titicaca.

After dark we'll return to our family homes. There are no cars or roads on Amantani, and even dogs are forbidden, so the silence after nightfall is complete. This must be one of the most peaceful places in the world.

**Accommodation:** Homestay on Amantani Island

**Meals:** All meals included

## Day 7 Textiles on Taquile

After breakfast, a short cruise across Lake Titicaca brings us to Taquile, one of the most fascinating islands in the world. It was isolated until the 1950s and still follows a very different way of life. Decisions are communal, economic activity is co-operative, and society is based on the fundamental Inca principles: "Ama sua, ama llulla, ama quella" (don't steal, don't lie, don't be lazy).

Taquile is also the most famous textile centre in the Andes. Its storytelling textiles, designed and woven by Taquile's men, from thread spun by its women, are world famous. On top of all this, the scenery is stunning, and the peace and serenity is like nowhere else on Earth. Taquile is just magic!

**Accommodation:** Four-star hotel in Puno

**Meals:** All meals included

## Day 8 Ancient mysteries in Peru and Bolivia

We'll spend five hours driving to La Paz today, with three key stops along the way: Tiwanaku, a pre-Inca ceremonial center of pilgrimage and human sacrifice; Chucuito, where 86 huge stone phalluses are buried every which way in what is said to be an Inca fertility temple, and Aramu Muru, a stone-carved door into another dimension, said to be a teleporter for Inca priests. Locals and esoteric groups from all over the world now conduct rituals here, and many visitors, our guests among them, have felt a deep peace and release, or seen mysterious lights, stars, and columns of fire! Even if mystical interdimensional portals aren't your thing, you'll enjoy the windswept majesty, imposing rock formations, and views of Lake Titicaca around it.

**Accommodation:** Four-star hotel in La Paz

**Meals:** All meals included

## Day 9 Surreal La Paz

Even by South American standards of chaos, La Paz is a crazy cool city!

First up, we'll jump aboard a cable car (the city has a whole big network of them) and head up to El Alto, where Bolivia's most famous architect has transformed the city with his garish, larger-than-life buildings, called cholets. If Wes Anderson designed housing for Oompa Loompas, it might look something like this.

Back down in the old town, we'll get oriented and check out some of La Paz's sights, including dancing zebras, a clock that runs backwards, and a jail that used to have its own cocaine factory.

With the wave of a wand and a puff of smoke, we'll find ourselves at the witches' market, where you can stock up on pills, potions, and powders for whatever ails you. Get your puma amulets, your desiccated frogs and your sun-dried llama fetus here!

**Accommodation:** Four-star hotel in La Paz

**Meals:** All meals included

## Day 10 Onwards!

Your time with us ends after breakfast at the hotel today - or if you're keen to delve deeper into Bolivia, we're here to help!

**Meals:** Breakfast included

## What's included

- All accommodation (*based on twin-share. Single supplement available for US\$550*)
- All transportation, including airport transfers at start and end of trip
- All attractions and activities specified in itinerary
- Dedicated Aspiring Adventures guides
- All meals, as specified in the itinerary
- Clean, safe drinking water throughout the trip

## What's not included

- Alcoholic beverages
- Laundry and room service
- Tips for guides and drivers

## Accommodations

In Puno and La Paz we stay in our favorite four-star hotels. Between Cusco and Puno we stay in warm, comfortable rooms in a historic family hacienda. In Raqchi and on Amantani Island we stay in humble family homes. Here, conditions are basic, and hygiene may not be what you are used to at home, but any slight discomfort you experience will be well compensated for by this incredible insight into a very different way of life.