



Adventure tours that delve deeper

The Paucartambo trip

TRIP LENGTH: 12 days
STARTS AND ENDS: Cusco

The most famous of all of Peru's incredible syncretic religious festivals, the Fiesta de la Virgen del Carmen in Paucartambo is the ultimate Peru experience: two days of non-stop music, parades, games, dances, and fireworks, along with an unforgettable, hallucinogenic sunrise.

This comprehensive trip also includes plenty of time in Cusco and the Sacred Valley - including either hiking the Inca trail to Machu Picchu or taking our own adventurous, jungle route there - to round out an action-packed and unforgettable trip to Peru.

Day 1 Welcome to Cusco

Welcome to Cusco! We'll meet you at 1pm for a traditional Peruvian meal at one of our favourite local restaurants. In the afternoon your guide will lead a relaxed walking tour around Cusco's stunning historic centre - it's important to take it easy if you've arrived from sea level today, as you need to acclimate to Cusco's 3,000m+ altitude.

Accommodation: Comfortable hotel in Cusco
Meals: Lunch and dinner included

Day 2 Stunning scenery in the Sacred Valley

The sunny, incredibly scenic floodplain between Pisac and Ollantaytambo in the valley of the Urubamba River is known as the Sacred Valley of the Incas. Pisac is a tiny, cobbled Inca village which is home to the largest handicraft market in the region and a huge Inca fortress. We'll explore both, then set off into the Sacred Valley. We'll need frequent photo stops as we pass still-working Inca terracing, irrigation canals, and awesome mountain vistas. Our destination is Ollantaytambo, perhaps the most perfectly preserved of all Inca towns, a maze of cobbled alleyways and sun-drenched plazas presided over by a spectacular, llama-shaped ruin.

Accommodation: Cosy, family-run Ollantaytambo hotel
Meals: All meals included

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OPTION A: JUNGLE TRAIL TO MACHU PICCHU

Day 3 Ruins, weavers, and a functioning Inca factory

Today starts with Chinchero, best known for its outdoor weaving studios and extensive Inca terracing with incredible views. Next we'll explore Moray – a mysterious complex of massive amphitheaters of incredible engineering precision and stern, magnificent beauty.

Then an easy stroll (or ride in the vehicle if you prefer), through rolling farmland and views of the high Andes, brings us to Salineras – a surreal and beautiful patchwork of pools and paths that still produces salt using Inca technology and is our favourite site in the Cusco region.

Accommodation: Family-run hotel in Ollantaytambo

Meals: All meals included

Day 4 Adventures in the Amazon basin

Today we cross one of the world's more drastic topographical divides: from the arid, Pacific side of the Andes to its lush western slope and the uppermost reaches of the Amazon Basin. The differences become more and more obvious as we descend from the icy high pass of Abra Malaga (4,350m/14,000ft), all the way down to the steamy heat of the ceja de selva ("eyebrow of the jungle").

Our destination, sleepy Santa Teresa (1,550m/5,085ft), is home to one of our favourite places in Peru, the Baños Termales de Cocalmayo, natural mountain hot springs beside a raging river. It's the perfect place to soak away the road dust of today's journey from one side of the Andes to the other.

If you're into biking, you might want to ride some or all of the day's long descent to the high jungle – it's an incredibly fun, freewheeling, downhill and is suitable for anyone who can ride a bike. We provide bikes so you can ride as much or as little as you like.

Accommodation: Rustic eco-lodge near Santa Teresa

Meals: All meals included

Day 5 Meet local coffee growers and sample their wares

Coffee, grown at cottage-industry level and exported to the world through growers' co-operatives, is the backbone of this area's economy. This morning a local coffee producer will show us around their plantation, and the operation where they harvest and mill coffee.

In the afternoon we'll take a short (seven kilometer/five mile) train ride to Aguas Calientes. There's time this afternoon to explore the market and admire the scenery all around and above us – the isolated little town has one of the most beautiful settings you'll see in Peru, in a jungle gorge by a rushing river.

Accommodation: Comfortable hotel in Aguas Calientes

Meals: All meals included

OPTION B: INCA TRAIL HIKE TO MACHU PICCHU (add US\$250)

Day 3 Start hiking the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu

We'll get up very early this morning to take the bus to Kilometre 82, the start of the Inca Trail. The hike begins in the Sacred Valley as we follow the Urubamba River, climbing ever higher and eventually heading off up the Cusicacha Valley, through semi-arid forest and farming villages, to Wayllabamba, where we'll camp for the night.

Accommodation:	Camping on the Inca Trail
Meals:	All meals included
Walking:	12 kilometres (7.5 miles)
Min. Altitude:	2700m (8860ft)
Max. Altitude:	3100m (10,170ft)
Altitude of camp:	3100m (10,170ft)

Day 4 Hike over Warmiwayñusca Pass

Most of our walking time today is taken up by a stiff 1,200 metre (3,940 feet) hike up to Warmiwayñusca (Dead Woman's Pass), the highest point of the Inca Trail. From here, if it's clear, we'll enjoy incredible views back the way we came, and onwards towards the distant, snow-capped Vilcabamba Range. Then we descend steeply into Pacaymayo, our campsite for the night with one of the best views in the Andes.

Accommodation:	Camping on the Inca Trail
Meals:	All meals included
Walking:	11 kilometres (6.8 miles)
Min. Altitude:	3100m (10,170ft)
Max. Altitude:	4200m (13,780ft)
Altitude of camp:	3600m (11,810ft)

Day 5 Runkurakay, Sayacmarca and Wiñaywayna

Today's hike takes us through some of the most stunning scenery in Peru, with cloud forest, orchids, hummingbirds and mountains on all sides, and to three gorgeous little ruins – Runkurakay, Sayacmarca, and Wiñaywayna, next to the evening's campsite. Along the way we cross the watershed of the Andes – this is one of the best days trekking in the world.

Accommodation:	Camping on the Inca Trail
Meals:	All meals included
Walking:	12 kilometres (7.5 miles)
Min. Altitude:	2670m (8760ft)
Max. Altitude:	3900m (12,800ft)
Altitude of camp:	2670m (8760ft)

Day 6 Machu Picchu!

A spectacular stone city surrounded by incredibly steep, incredibly green mountains, Machu Picchu needs no introduction and is deservedly one of the new Seven Wonders of the World.

We'll be up at sunrise so there's time for your guide to show you around Machu Picchu's main citadel, as well as our favourite hidden nooks and crannies, before the crowds arrive. Then there's time for your own exploration of the massive, still-mysterious site, before we catch the train back to Cusco.

Accommodation: Comfortable hotel in Cusco

Meals: All meals included

Day 7 Free day in Cusco

There are things to do in Cusco to suit every mood and personality: churches, museums, and art galleries; adventure activities like rafting and horse riding, and organised tours. This is also the perfect day to just wander around and enjoy the spectacular mountain views, traditionally dressed locals, excellent cafes and charming architecture that characterise the historic centre of Cusco.

Accommodation: Comfortable hotel in Cusco

Meals: Breakfast included

Day 8 Colourful culture and fantastic fireworks

The South Valley, on the way to Paucartambo, is one of our favourite places to take our guests, because it offers a one-day snapshot of the incredible variety of this whole region. There we'll meet a brujo (witch) who can read your future in coca leaves and see how bakers create the area's famous chuta bread, as well as exploring Tipón – one of the most charming ruins we've ever seen, with its still-working agricultural terraces and Inca irrigation. We'll arrive to Paucartambo late in the afternoon, in time for the incredible firework display this night of the festival is known for.

Accommodation: Basic accommodations in Paucartambo

Meals: All meals included

Day 9 Central day of Paucartambo festival

Today each of the *comparsas* (companies) of dancers perform their hearts out in honour of Mamacha Carmen - the entire day is a non-stop orgy of Andean dance and costume. Each *comparsa* represents a specific mythical or historical character – the *Saqras* (devils), and *Quyachas* (little queens), are some of the most famous. In the afternoon they all accompany the Virgin through the town in a joyous procession. We'll watch from a strategic position and your guide will explain what the dances and costumes represent – everything from comic moments in Peruvian colonial history, to the mythic battle between good and evil!

Later, if you wish, we'll take a late-night trip to Tres Cruces, on the very edge of the Andes – from here you look straight down into the Amazon Basin. In June and July, thanks to very specific climactic conditions, sunrise here is often accompanied by optical illusions – this is a morning you'll never forget.

Accommodation: Basic accommodations in Paucartambo

Meals: All meals included

Day 10 Paucartambo's best day

In the morning we'll follow the solemn procession to the cemetery to pay our respects to the departed, and in the afternoon, we'll take our places for our favourite event of the festival – the playful guerrilla (little war) in the Plaza de Armas. Featuring among many other things a water fight, a war between highlanders and jungle people, and devils dragging souls to hell on fiery carts, it's a messy, hilarious, utterly unique afternoon of fun.

Most spectators leave Paucartambo after the guerrilla, making this evening the best opportunity of the whole festival to see dancers from up close and without crowds.

Accommodation: Basic accommodations in Paucartambo

Meals: All meals included

Day 11 Back to Cusco, and civilization!

This morning we'll drive back to Cusco. In the afternoon you may choose to rest and enjoy a hot shower, or to accompany your guide for more exploration of the cobbled streets, graceful plazas, museums and churches of central Cusco.

This evening we'll celebrate our return to the 21st century with a gourmet dinner at one of Cusco's finest restaurants.

Accommodation: Comfortable hotel in Cusco

Meals: All meals included

Day 12 Departure day

You can book your flight out of Cusco for any time today. If you're staying on in Peru, we'd be delighted to help out with suggestions for the rest of your time here.

Meals: Breakfast included

What's included:

- All accommodation (*based on twin-share. Single supplement available for US\$350*)
- All ground transport
- All activities specified in itinerary
- Dedicated Aspiring Adventures guide
- Entrance to all attractions specified in itinerary
- Extra permit to climb Huayna Picchu at Machu Picchu if available at time of booking (*with Option A*)
- All meals as specified (*11 breakfasts, 10 lunches, 10 dinners*)
- Drinking water

What's not included:

- Tips for your guide(s)
- Drinks apart from water
- Extra cost for Option B, Inca Trail hike (*add US\$250*)
- Option B only (Inca Trail hike): sleeping bag and mat (*available for hire for US\$40 per item*)
- Option B only (Inca Trail hike): tips for your porters and cooks
- Option B only (Inca Trail hike): Porter to carry your personal gear (*available for US\$60*)

Accommodations:

Accommodations on our Peru trips are our favourites in each town. In Cusco, Ollantaytambo and Aguas Calientes we stay in comfortable hotels (generally of three-star standard) that are quirky and individual. In Santa Teresa we stay in a rustic eco-lodge. On the Inca Trail we sleep in tents.

In Paucartambo we stay at the most luxurious accommodation available, which is very far from fancy. For these nights, conditions are basic, and if you are not willing to put up with cold showers, limited electricity, and very basic facilities, then the Paucartambo festival is not for you. If you are, any discomfort you experience will be well compensated by the experience and insight into this unique cultural event.

Food at Paucartambo:

Paucartambo is a small, rural Peruvian town where choice is limited, and hygiene standards are not the same as you are used to. Your guide is there to make the best possible food choices for you and you are more likely to be bothered by some of the food on offer (such as sheep stomach lining or cow udder), and non-Western standards of service, than hygiene issues. Food at this event is suitable for people who consider themselves adventurous. Vegetarians will face limited choice and should bring extra fruit and snacks. We provide water with meals. Bottled water is readily available to buy in-between times.