



Paucartambo

TRIP LENGTH: Four days
STARTS AND ENDS: Cusco
DATES: July 15-18

Paucartambo's *Fiesta de la Virgen del Carmen* is Peru's biggest, most beloved syncretic religious festival and the ultimate deep-Peru cultural experience: three days and nights of non-stop music, parades, games, dance, and fireworks.

Day 1, July 15 Colorful culture and fantastic fireworks

The adventure begins at midday, when we'll pick you up in Cusco and start to make our way to Paucartambo. We'll stop for a typical lunch along the way in local gastronomic playground, the South Valley - it's the perfect introduction to the combination of basic conditions, festive spirit, and massive piles of delicious food that, like the *fiesta de Paucartambo*, typify Peru!

After a drive of around three hours, we'll get settled in our lodgings in Paucartambo and head out for some exploring and orientation. The festival kicks off in the evening with an indescribable display of fire and fireworks... we guarantee you've never seen anything like it!

Accommodation: Basic accommodation in Paucartambo
Meals: Lunch and dinner included

Day 2, July 16 Central day of the Paucartambo festival

Today each of the *comparsas* (companies) of dancers perform their hearts out in honor of Mamacha Carmen - the entire day is a non-stop parade of Andean dance and costume. Each *comparsa* represents a specific mythical or historical character - the *Saqras* (devils), and *Coyachas* (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!

Very late tonight, if you wish, we'll take a ride to the famed lookout of Tres Cruces. It's perched on the very rim of the Amazon Basin, so you're looking out over the Amazon, and a completely different, very humid environment. Thanks to the specific climatic conditions this creates, sunrise here is often accompanied by optical illusions in June and July - this is a sunrise you'll never forget, and a very special pilgrimage-within-a-pilgrimage of the Paucartambo festival.

Accommodation: Basic accommodation in Paucartambo
Meals: All meals included

Day 3, July 17 Paucartambo's little war

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 favorite 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 the continuing parades of dancers from up close and without crowds, and wander the still-buzzing streets, markets, cobbled streets and river walk of lovely Paucartambo.

Accommodation: Basic accommodation in Paucartambo

Meals: All meals included

Day 4, July 18 Return to the real world

We'll get you back to Cusco today in time for lunch. After the non-stop madness of Paucartambo, we'll all be more than ready for a hot shower, some quiet time, and a good night's sleep!

If we can be of assistance in your continuing exploration of Peru just let us know, we're here to help!

Meals: Breakfast included

What's included:

- All accommodation in shared (two people or more) room or tent
- All ground transportation
- All events specified in itinerary, with preferential seating and viewing where possible
- Dedicated Aspiring Adventures guide to look after you throughout the trip
- All meals as specified in the itinerary
- Clean, safe drinking water throughout the trip

What's not included

- Tips for your guides & drivers
- Alcoholic beverages

Conditions at Paucartambo

Available accommodation at Paucartambo varies from year to year. It is two-star level at best. If we obtain adequate roofed accommodation, it may entail sharing a room with several of our group members. Some years we determine camping is the best option available. Wherever we sleep, the noise of the festival goes on all night; a good night's sleep is not a feature of the Paucartambo trip!

In general, conditions are crowded and basic. Customer service (in restaurants etc) is unreliable or nonexistent. Your expert guide is there every step of the way to take care of you, and to explain the spectacle that surrounds you.

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 genuine food hygiene issues. Food at this event is suitable for people who consider themselves adventurous. People with any dietary restrictions, including vegetarians, will face severely limited choice and should bring extra fruit and snacks