

The Essential

Peru Travel Guide

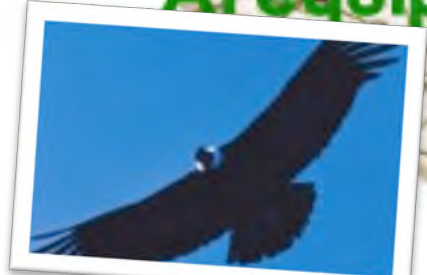


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El Perú



Best Peru Destinations

Lima: City of Kings

Arequipa and the Colca Canyon

Peruvian Amazon Rainforest

Northern Desert: Trujillo, Cajamarca, & Chiclayo

Lake Titicaca: Birthplace of the Inca Empire

Cusco: History in Stone

Machu Picchu: Secret of the Incas

Best Peru Tours

Essence of Peru

Incas and the Amazon

The Lost City of the Incas

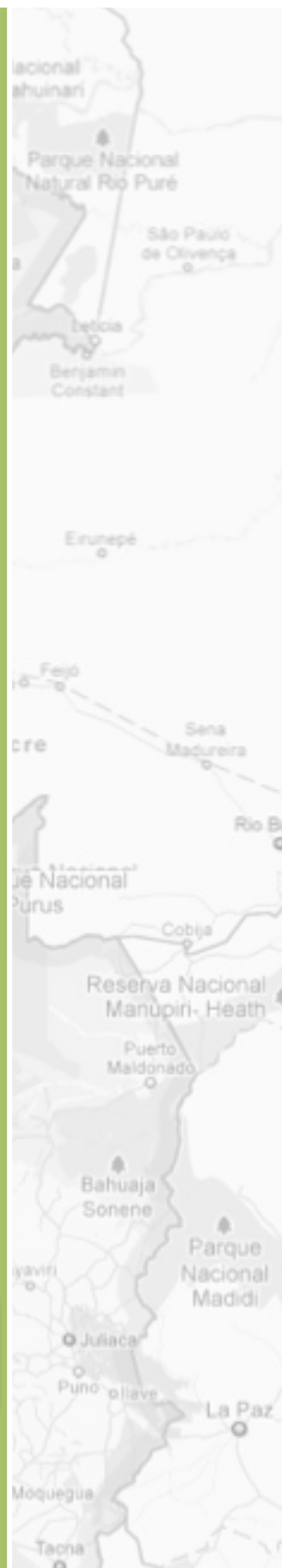
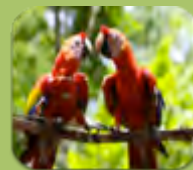
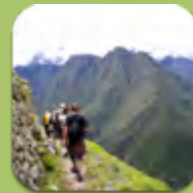
Travels of the Incas

The Trujillo Circuit

Kuelap and Northern Peru

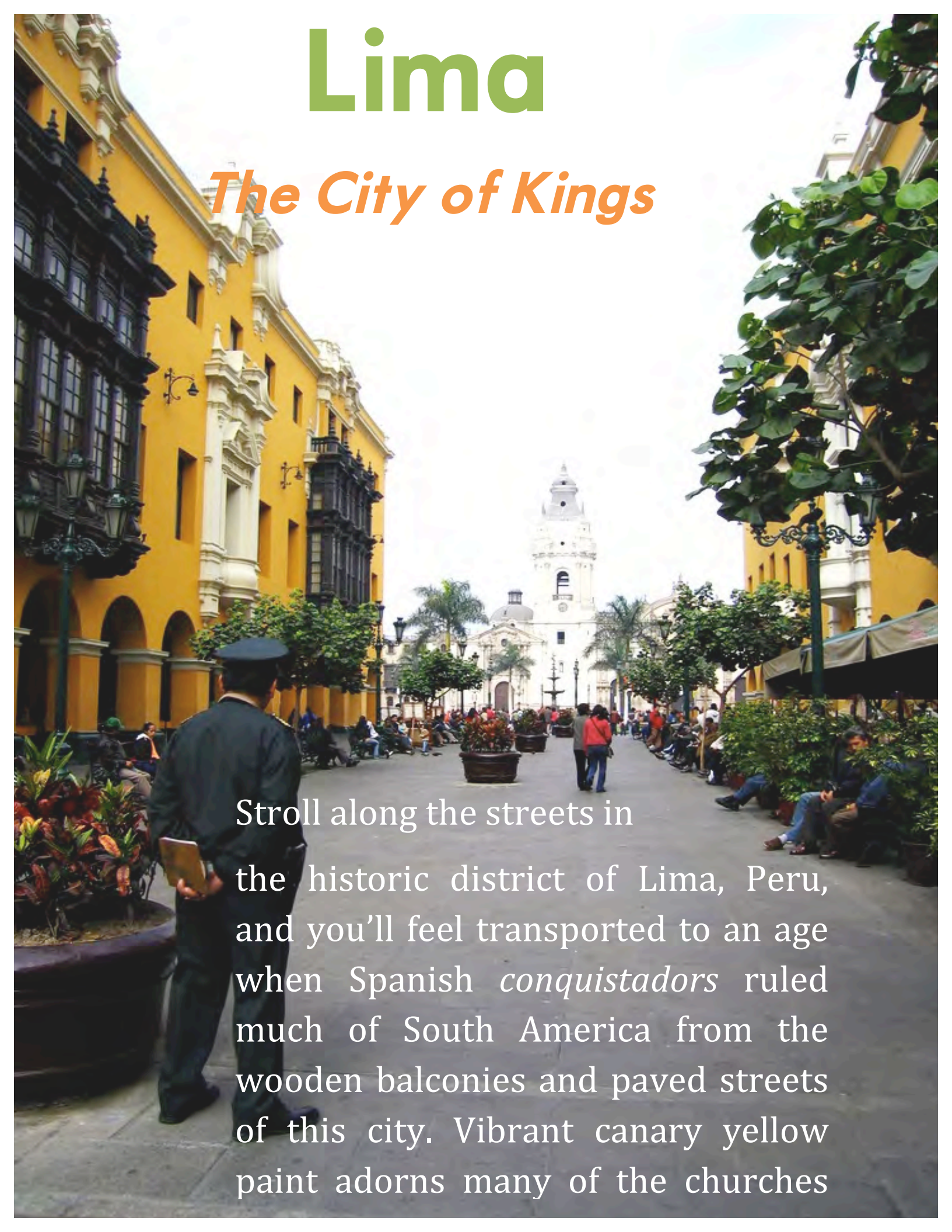
Inca Trail to Machu Picchu

Machu Picchu & the Galapagos Islands



Lima

The City of Kings

A street scene in Lima, Peru, showing yellow buildings, a uniformed person, and a church in the distance. The street is paved and lined with yellow buildings featuring dark wooden balconies. A person in a dark uniform and cap stands in the foreground, looking towards the street. In the distance, a large white church with a dome and a bell tower is visible. The street is populated with people walking and sitting on benches. There are potted plants and trees along the sidewalks.

Stroll along the streets in the historic district of Lima, Peru, and you'll feel transported to an age when Spanish *conquistadors* ruled much of South America from the wooden balconies and paved streets of this city. Vibrant canary yellow paint adorns many of the churches

Lima, Peru

The capital of Peru, Lima is a burgeoning metropolis with a population of over 9 million. Visitors to Lima flock to the posh seaside neighborhoods of Miraflores and Barranco. Dotted with parks and open spaces, these neighborhoods offer quiet respite from the frantic cajoling of buses, taxis, and peddlers on the city streets. Fruit carts, shoe shiners, and magazine stands adorn nearly every street corner.



The hub of activity centers in the **Ovalo Miraflores**, where huge department stores loom over backpacker hostels and churches. Stroll the shops on Larco street until the buildings give way to a lush open green, the glossy high-rise JW Marriot, and the crystalline Pacific Ocean. Here is **Larcomar**, where paragliders launch off the Costa Verde cliffs and wave hello to shopper and diners nestled in the Larcomar shopping center.



Spend the evening in **El Centro**, the historic district, where the **Plaza de Armas** is lit up beautifully at night. Much of the architecture has been wonderfully preserved, including the **Cathedral**, several museums, monasteries, and colonial mansions. The **Monastery of San Francisco** is a must-see, with its centuries-old library and the Well of Souls deep in its catacombs.

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6 Things to Do In Lima, Peru

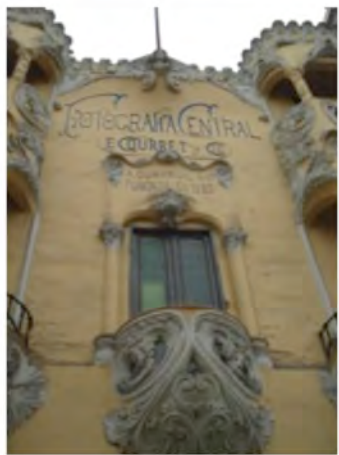
#1 Visit the Plaza de Armas in the Historic District

Today, Pizarro's tomb lies in the Lima Cathedral, and the heavy-handed influence of the Spanish colonial era is evident in the historic district of the city, called El Centro Historico. The Plaza de Armas, or the Main Square, is a lovely place to while away an afternoon, whether people-watching or witnessing the Changing of the Guard at the Palacio Gobierno, or Government Palace. The palace is decorated in a lavish French neo-baroque style, with wrought iron gating and ornate façade. Sit on the steps of the Cathedral and admire its soaring front doors, called **La Portada de Perdon**, or Doorway of Forgiveness.



#2 Drink a Pisco Sour in Plaza San Martin

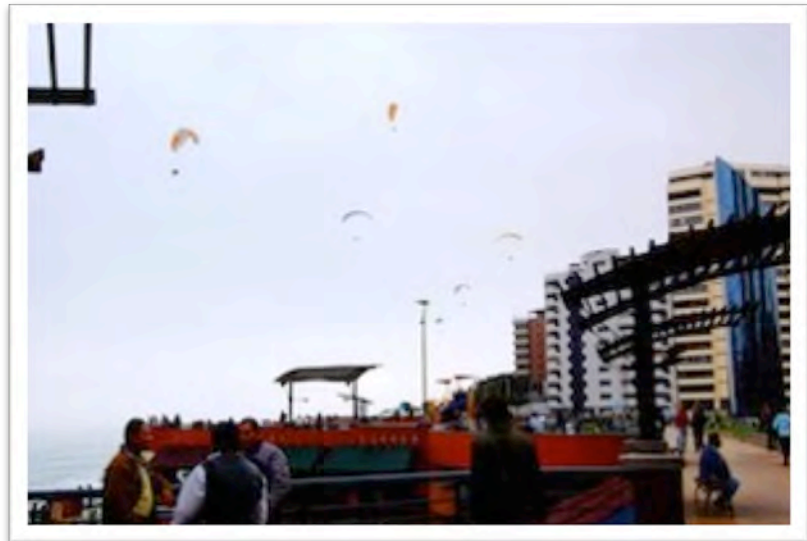
From the Plaza de Armas, you can walk along Jr. de La Union Street towards Plaza San Martin. The Jr. de La Union street was once full of churches, elegant homes, and small shops, as evidenced by the ornate facades on the top level of the buildings. One of the most unique is the Casa Courret, decked in Art Nouveau style. But now there are large electronics and clothing stores and **pollo** restaurants – an interesting juxtaposition worth pondering while you browse the shops. Head to Hotel Bolívar and order a Pisco Sour from this 20th century establishment that has earned the reputation of being both elegant and reliable when it



comes to pouring a perfect Pisco.

#3 Go Paragliding Over the Costa Verde

While you're near the coast of Lima, you're sure to see paragliders riding the drafts that come off the Pacific and hit the jutting cliff side. If you're in for a spin, head to Larcomar, the shopping center and park in the most beautiful part of the Miraflores District. You'll know you've arrived at the Larcomar when you see the glass-gilded JW Marriott Hotel looming overhead. Here many paragliders take off, and you can ask for a guide to take you out over the Costa Verde for a fee. Soaring over the coastline, you'll view Lima from its most beautiful angle.



#4 Dine in the Huaca Pucllana Restaurant and see the Ruins



Well before the time of the Incas, an ancient people called the Lima gave the land its name, and built large *huacas*, or temples, throughout the region. The Huaca Pucllana is one of the most impressive. Located in the Miraflores District, the sandy dirt and adobe bricks of this pre-Inca temple are surrounded on all sides by suburban homes. After dark, the ruins are lit up beautifully and the adjacent 5 star restaurant enjoys a direct view of the ruins. Dine on *aji de gallina*, a Peruvian specialty, or a number of other delectable dishes, while gazing out at the centuries-old

bricks.

#5 See the Well of Souls at the Monastery of San Francisco

Although photography inside the monastery and subterranean catacombs is prohibited, occasionally a brave soul will sneak a photo or two of the impressive “Well of Souls,” a geometric arrangement of femurs and skulls inside the catacombs. The San Francisco Monastery is located near the Plaza de Armas, and is worth visiting even if this is the only church you see while in Lima. This baroque-style church painted in canary yellow is often lined with pigeons roosting among the concave ridges in the façade. Inside, the monk’s library contains thousands of books dating from the conquest and even before the colonial era, and makes up one of the most impressive library collections in the Americas.



of the most impressive library collections in the Americas.

#6 Visit the Second Home of Victor Delfin and Parke del Amor



The Peruvian sculptor and artist Victor Delfin has produced many works of art that have placed modern Peruvian art on the international art scene. Perhaps most notable of his works is the Parke del Amor, or Park of Love, located just north of Larcomar. Enjoy the sunset and gaze upon the larger-than-life statue of lovers in a passionate embrace.



Arequipa & the Colca Canyon

Arequipa sits at the foot of El Misti Volcano, located high in the southern deserts of Peru. This city was an important juncture on the colonial trade routes from Lima to Santiago and beyond. It still boasts its colonial, old-world charm with its archways, brightly painted buildings, Spanish-style Plaza de Armas, and the **Santa Catalina monastery** in existence since the 16th century.



Miles beyond Arequipa lies the **Colca Canyon**, a gaping gorge that could swallow the Grand Canyon in one gulp. Here Andean condors soar the thermals above the canyon. At the Mirador lookout point, visitors can oftentimes watch these condors in flight. Dotted with small Andean villages, the Colca Valley features many agricultural terraces that the local people continue to farm in the tradition of the Incas.



The Peruvian Amazon Rainforest

The Amazon Rainforest isn't something you should miss.



Although Brazil has the lion's share of the Amazon Rainforest, the eastern side of Peru cradles thick rainforest vegetation and Amazon River tributaries that beckon the traveler to explore its many oxbow lakes, winding rivers, and crisscrossing trails.

There are three main rainforest areas in Peru, the northernmost Iquitos, the south-central Manú, and the southern Puerto Maldonado where the Tambopato and the Madre de Dios Rivers collide. You may see pink river dolphins, river otters, caiman, hoatzins, Andean cock-of-the-rock, sloths, monkeys, parrots, & macaws.

Spend the days roaming the wilderness, canoeing in the morning to spot early birds, relaxing in the afternoon in a hammock with a cocktail in hand, and evenings watching the sunset over the rainforest canopy.



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A row of tall, conical, woven reed structures, likely traditional Peruvian fishing rafts, stands on a sandy beach. The structures are made of light-colored reeds or bamboo, bound together with dark cords. They are arranged in a line, receding into the distance. The sky is a pale, overcast blue with soft, white clouds. The overall scene is bright and natural.

The Northern Desert

Trujillo, Cajamarca, & Chiclayo

Peru's pre-Inca
archaeological treasure trove

The Trujillo Circuit



The Inca Empire met its fate in **Cajamarca**, the coastal city where the last Inca Atahualpa was captured, held for ransom, and then executed by the Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro. Atahualpa claimed his empire could fill a room once with gold and twice with silver. The Inca people stripped many lavishly decorated temples to bring the precious metals to the feet of the Spanish. The Spanish received the ransom, but reneged on their promise to release the Inca. The alleged **Ransom Room** is still standing in Cajamarca today.



But the fascinating history of northwestern Peru goes back further than the 16th century. Pre-Inca peoples known as the Chavin, Moche, Chimu, and others thrived in the region, leaving behind intricate artwork, impressive sculpture, and many religious and civic buildings in the dry coastal desert of northern Peru.



Highlights on **the Trujillo Circuit** tour include a visit to the Moche Temple of the Sun and Temple of the Moon, the “El Brujo” complex built by the Moche people, and the royal tombs and museums of Sipan and Sican. Many of these sites were only discovered in the 1980s and 1990s.

Another important archaeological site is **Kuelap**, home of a stone fortress built on a hilltop near Chachapoyas in northern Peru. Tucked into the cloud forest, the Kuelap fortress is an impressive pre-Inca site worth exploring for its aqueducts, well-preserved walls, and distinctive turrets.

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Lake Titicaca

Birthplace of the Inca Empire



Legend has it that the god Viracocha created humanity here. Manco Capac, the first Inca, was born out of the reeds of **Lake Titicaca**, and given the task to carry a golden staff until it sank into the ground in Cusco, where he established his empire.

The people of **Uros** live on the lake in handcrafted **floating islands** made from the *titora* reed that grows on the shore. They plant crops on the islands, fish in the lake, and weave colorful and intricate clothing. In recent years, the Uros people have also sustained themselves by selling textiles and handicrafts such as miniature reed boats to visitors.

The largest island in the lake is the **Isla del Sol**. Ruins of pre-Inca and Inca ruins are scattered about the island. Stroll along the hilly island and gaze out upon the crystal-blue waters stretching out in all directions.

Cusco

History in Stone



The Incas called Cusco “the Navel of the Universe,” and

from here, they ruled a vast empire that stretched from Peru south to Chile, Bolivia, and Argentina, north to Ecuador and parts of Colombia. The Spanish conquistadors, busy razing the Mayan Empire in Mexico, caught wind of a great empire in Peru that had rich lodes of gold and silver. The conquistadores arrived in 1532 and by 1533, the Inca leader Manco was fighting a losing battle against the Spanish, and fled into the jungle beyond Cusco and the Sacred Valley.

Even after the colonization of Cusco, several earthquakes, and the modernization of many of its buildings, Cusco retains several of its important Inca structures – albeit many are merely the foundations for later Spanish structures or recent posh hotels. Even still, it’s possible to see some of the former grandeur of the Inca capital, such as **the 12-sided stone on Hatun Rumiyoq street.**



The Sacred Valley of the Incas

From Pisac, Chinchero, Maras, Moray, & Ollantaytambo to Llactapata, Wiñaywayna, and Machu Picchu, the Sacred Valley of the Incas was dotted with *tambos* (rest stops) and small farm villages. Many surmise that the Inca Trail led through the Sacred Valley to Machu Picchu because the site was one of vital religious significance.

Pisac is worth visiting both for its agricultural terraces and its open-air market. Visit

Good to Know

If you're interested in hiking the Inca Trail, get your tickets well in advance. The Inca Trail is often booked months in advance, especially during the busiest months of June-August. There are also several excellent alternative Inca Trails, & all treks can be combined with a Machu Picchu tour.

Maras and Moray to see more impressive Inca agricultural terraces and salt mine terraces. Stop in **Ollantaytambo** to climb the massive terraces on a hilltop hovering over this quaint town. Spend the night in the town, which has been in operation since the time of the Incas. Then continue through the Sacred Valley by train, which whisks you along the Urubamba River to Aguas Calientes, or by foot on **the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu**.

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Machu Picchu

Secret of the Incas

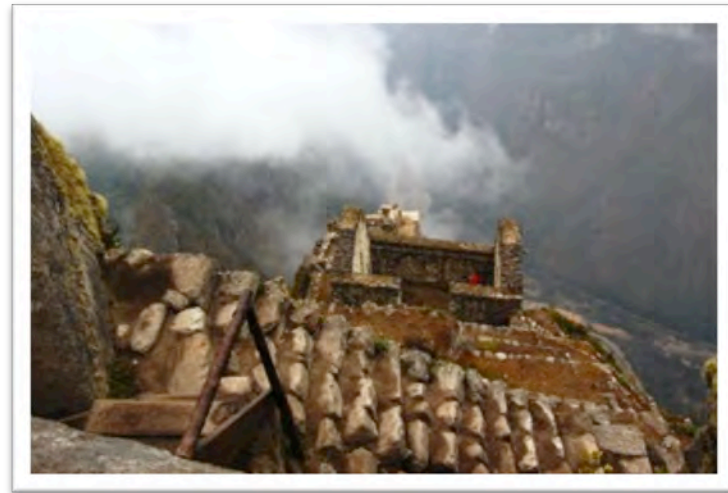
In the 1950s, a Charlton Heston movie came out called the *Secret of the Incas*, which featured Machu Picchu on the silver screen for the first time. Although the movie relied more heavily on Hollywood than on history, the movie does give an excellent view into how Cusco and Machu Picchu looked in the days before the region became one of the ultimate travel destinations and a new world wonder.

Machu Picchu



Nestled in the cloud forest on the edge of the Peruvian Amazon, the stone city of **Machu Picchu** is situated in one of the most verdant and dramatic landscapes in Peru. Indeed, many experts on Machu Picchu believe that the Inca city was deliberately placed deep in the forests, atop luminous granite mountains, for religious purposes.

There is something breathtaking when you arrive at Machu Picchu early in the morning, when the mist still shrouds the city and the surrounding mountains. The agricultural terraces built on the side of mountain seem to fall off into infinity. The giant walls made of precisely cut Inca stones are the best remaining examples of Inca stonework. And the granite peak of **Huaynu Picchu** looms over it all, beckoning more adventurous travelers to scale its vertiginous cliff.




When traveling to Machu Picchu, try to get there early – if you're lucky, the clouds will break and you'll be treated to a wonderful sunrise. But either way, you'll beat the crowds, and be able to explore the abandoned city almost virtually on your own. Take a picture from the **Funerary Rock Hut**, also known as the **Watchman's Hut**, search for the **Royal Tomb**, or walk to the **Inti Punku Sun Gate**, which is the finish of the Inca Trail. Trekkers who want an additional challenge should reserve in advance a ticket to hike to Huaynu Picchu. The hike takes about 2 hours, and although some parts are steep with narrow stone staircases, the view of Machu Picchu below is stunning.

[View all our Machu Picchu Tours](#)



#1 The Essence of Peru



9-15 Days in Lima, Paracas, Ballestas Islands, Nazca Lines, Arequipa, Lake Titicaca, Cuzco, & Machu Picchu

Peru is a land full of rich history, incredible natural beauty, and friendly people. You'll see the Spanish colonial architecture in Lima's historic center, the beauty of Paracas Bay and the Ballestas Islands, the mysterious Nazca Lines, the mythical Lake Titicaca, and the condors of the Colca Canyon.

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Essence of Peru
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