

# Regional Guide

## Perú

Perú's current socio-cultural-political context is marked by a rich tapestry of Indigenous, European, African, and Asian influences reflecting its diverse population.

Economically, the country has experienced growth due to its significant mineral resources, though it faces challenges such as income inequality and rural poverty. Socially, there's a vibrant cultural scene that celebrates traditional customs and festivals, alongside a growing urbanization that's blending old and new lifestyles. Politically, Perú has encountered instability with frequent changes in leadership and ongoing challenges related to corruption, governance, and human rights. This has led to widespread public protests and political unrest.

Despite these challenges, there's a strong sense of national identity and pride in Perú's historical heritage, particularly its Incan past and archaeological sites. The country continues to navigate its complex issues while striving for social progress and sustainable development.

### Geography and Geology

Perú's geography is diverse, ranging from the arid plains of the coastal desert to the peaks of the Andes mountains and the tropical forests of the Amazon Basin. This diversity results in a variety of climates and ecosystems. Perú also has several important rivers, including the Amazon River, which begins in the Peruvian Andes.

Perú sits on the Pacific Ring of Fire, where the Nazca Plate is subducting beneath the South American Plate, leading to a high level of geologic activity, including earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and mountain building. This geologic activity is responsible for the Andes mountains and has created rich mineral resources, including silver, copper, gold, and zinc.

### Inca History

The Incas were a civilization in the Andes Mountain range, with their empire, known as Tawantinsuyu, spanning parts of present-day Perú, Ecuador, Bolivia, Argentina, Chile, and Colombia. They were known for their advanced agricultural techniques, impressive architecture (including Machu Picchu and Sacsayhuamán), and extensive network of roads. The Inca Empire was the largest empire in pre-

Columbian America. It was eventually conquered by the Spanish in the 16th century, led by Francisco Pizarro.

The Incas left a lasting legacy in Perú, evident in the country's culture, language, and traditions. Their history is a significant aspect of Peruvian identity and continues to be an area of research and fascination.

## Altitude Considerations

During this Andean expedition, we will travel to high-altitude locations such as the Sacred Valley, Machu Picchu, and Cusco which can require some preparation due to the potential for altitude sickness. Acclimating is key which is why we will spend a few days at intermediate altitudes, such as in the Sacred Valley or Aguas Calientes, before visiting Machu Picchu to allow your body to adjust.

Hydrating before and during your visit to Machu Picchu will help prevent the effects of altitude sickness.

Even if you feel good, pace yourself as you explore the sites. The steep steps and uneven terrain combined with the altitude can make walking more challenging than at lower elevations. Be aware of the symptoms of altitude sickness, which can include headache, nausea, fatigue, dizziness, and shortness of breath. If you experience these, take a break, rest, and if necessary, descend to a lower altitude. Heavy meals can exacerbate altitude sickness symptoms. Eat light and energy-rich foods to maintain your energy levels without overtaxing your digestion. Avoid alcohol and sleeping pills as these can worsen the symptoms of altitude sickness and disrupt your sleep patterns and acclimatization. If you've suffered from altitude sickness before, consider talking to a doctor about preventive medications before your trip.

Remember, everyone reacts to altitude differently, and previous experience with high altitudes doesn't guarantee you won't have issues. Always listen to your body, and if you feel very unwell, don't hesitate to seek medical assistance.

### **Lima (0 - 155 metres above sea level)**

The capital and largest city of Perú is located on the country's arid Pacific coast. It's known for its vibrant culinary scene, colonial architecture, and rich history. Lima serves as the cultural and economic heart of Perú, with a blend of Indigenous and international influences. Key attractions include the Plaza Mayor, the Cathedral of Lima, and the Larco Museum, which houses a vast collection of pre-Columbian art.

### **Valle Sagrado (2,000 – 3,000 metres above sea level)**

The Sacred Valley of the Incas is located in the Andes of Perú, close to Cusco and below Machu Picchu. The valley is characterized by its lush landscape, traditional villages, and ancient Incan ruins. It was an important area for the Inca Empire due to its geographical and climatic qualities, which were ideal for agriculture. It's an ideal destination for those interested in exploring Incan history and culture. Notable sites that we will explore are Ollantaytambo, Pisac, and the Maras salt pans.

### **Machu Picchu Pueblo (2,040 metres above sea level)**

Machu Picchu Pueblo, often referred to as Aguas Calientes, is the town located nearest to the Machu Picchu ruins. It is the final stop for the train from Cusco before visiting Machu Picchu. The town is nestled in the mountains and is the starting point for most visitors heading to the ancient site. Although primarily known as a gateway to Machu Picchu, the town also offers hot springs and markets.

### **Machu Picchu (2,430 metres above sea level)**

The ancient Incan Citadel is set high in the Andes Mountains of Perú above the Urubamba Valley. Built in the 15th century and later abandoned, it's renowned for its sophisticated dry-stone construction that fuses huge blocks without the use of mortar, intriguing buildings that play on astronomical alignments, and panoramic views. Its exact former use remains a mystery, but it's most widely believed to have been a royal estate or religious site. Today, Machu Picchu stands as one of the most enduring symbols of the Inca Empire and has been designated a UNESCO World Heritage Site and one of the New Seven Wonders of the World, for its unparalleled historical significance and breathtaking beauty.

### **Cusco (3,400 metres above sea level)**

Cusco, once the heart of the Inca Empire, is a city in the Peruvian Andes. Known for its archaeological remains and Spanish colonial architecture, Cusco is often seen as the gateway to the Sacred Valley and Machu Picchu. The city's main square, Plaza de Armas, is home to the Cathedral of Cusco and the Church of La Compañía. Nearby, you can explore the ruins of Sacsayhuamán, a massive Incan fortress with sweeping views over the city. Cusco is also known for its vibrant Indigenous culture, colourful textiles, and rich traditions.

## **Sustainable Tourism Practices**

Sustainable tourism practices at sites like Machu Picchu and within Perú more broadly, aim to balance the preservation of natural and cultural heritage with the economic development and well-being of local communities.

Aiming to preserve cultural and natural heritage while ensuring sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, Perú has implemented visitor limits and entry time slots at Machu Picchu. Local communities are increasingly involved in tourism-related activities, from providing accommodations to selling artisanal products helping distribute economic benefits locally. Funds generated from tourism are reinvested into the conservation of historic sites and natural areas, as well as into community projects, helping to sustain cultural assets and biodiversity.

The Inca Trail and other paths to Machu Picchu are regulated to minimize ecological impact, with mandatory use of licensed guides who educate tourists on respectful and environmentally friendly behaviour. Continuous effort and collaboration among government, local communities, NGOs, and tourists are crucial to advancing these sustainable goals in Perú's tourism sector.