

Day 1: Lima, Peru

Arrive in Peru's capital where your journey to Machu Picchu and the Sacred Valley begins. For travelers extending to Machu Picchu before or after a Galapagos trip or our Great Amazon River Expedition, you will be met on arrival at the airport in Lima where our representative will be waiting just outside baggage claim to assist you with your transfer to our hotel, conveniently located nearby.

Day 2: Cusco / Sacred Valley—Pisac / Huayllabamba

Fly this morning to Cusco, heart of the once-grand Inca Empire, and meet your Expedition Leader on arrival. From the indigenous Quechua word *qosq'o*, Cusco means the "navel of the earth." Set in a high Andean valley, Cusco was founded in the 12th century and thrived until Spanish conquistadors destroyed the Inca civilization in their 16th-century colonial quest. From the Cusco airport, we head to the town of Pisac in the Sacred Valley, where we stop to have lunch and explore the 16th-century village during the market town's quieter afternoon hours. This community on the Vilcanota River and its famous Inca ruins are surrounded by ancient agricultural terraces that remain in use to this day. As the sun begins to set, settle in to our luxurious hacienda-style hotel near Huayllabamba to spend two nights in the heart of the Sacred Valley.

Day 3: Exploring the Sacred Valley of the Incas

The treasures of the Sacred Valley unfold today as we follow the Urubamba River past tawny hillsides dotted with traditional villages, small farms and Incan architectural ruins. The original vast empire of the Incas was connected by a network of 10,000 miles of stone roads woven through the imposing terrain of the Andes. Suspension bridges spanned rivers and aqueducts carried water from mountain streams to irrigate terraced fields of crops, vestiges of which we see on our journey today, backdropped by knife-edged peaks. At Moray, an Inca site more than 500 years old, we see where giant natural sinkholes were converted into circular terraced farming areas. Some archaeologists believe these served as an agricultural experiment where Inca cultivators took advantage of microclimates provided by different elevations. We also visit the salt mines at Maras, 3,000 small pools mined by the Incas centuries ago and still worked by locals today, and Chinchero, a small Andean village with terraced ruins located high on the windswept plains of Anta. From here, survey dramatic views over the Cordillera Vilcabamba and snowy summit of Salcantay dominating the western horizon. In Inca legend, Chinchero is the mythical birthplace of the rainbow. With a focus on less-frequented sites in the Sacred Valley, we may also stop at the agricultural terraces in Yucay or meet a local shepherd. This afternoon, there's time to relax at the hotel before dinner, drinking in views of the valley and imposing green mountains.

Day 4: Train to Aguas Calientes / Machu Picchu

This morning we board the train at Ollantaytambo for a 1-1/2-hour journey along the Urubamba River, which narrows into turbulent whitewater as we travel deeper into the mountains. At the village of Aguas Calientes, we disembark and board a bus for the short remaining drive to Machu Picchu. Little prepares one for the spectacle that awaits. As we ascend into the ruins, there's a sense of wandering through a mystical city in the sky, surrounded by green mountain ramparts that soar into the clouds. A local Machu Picchu tour guide joins us to help interpret all we see as we explore the labyrinth of granite houses, temples, walls and cisterns. Llamas wander among terraced steps that once grew maize and potatoes for some 1,200 inhabitants. Archaeologists believe Machu Picchu may have been a royal estate and religious retreat, based on its sacred geography and astronomical

orientation. Important ceremonies were conducted here, including a winter solstice rite at which a priest would “tie the sun” to a hitching post stone to prevent it from disappearing altogether.

Stay tonight at Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel in private casitas built of stone, tile and cedar, surrounded by the thick greenery of the cloud forest. More than 300 varieties of orchids grace the grounds of this secluded luxury retreat on the river, and a network of trails on the grounds invites a serene stroll.

Day 5: Machu Picchu / Cusco

This morning, we return to Machu Picchu for further exploration on a walking circuit that will reveal different portions of the complex from those we saw yesterday. Among the ruins, take the opportunity to ponder, in Hiram Bingham’s words, the “bewildering romance” of a place that “appears to have been expressly designed by nature as a sanctuary for the oppressed.” Those who wish may hike to the top of Wayna Picchu, the imposing mountain that provides the famous backdrop for the Lost City in classic photos. The Incas constructed the original trail to the top, where they built temples and farming terraces. Local myth holds that the summit of Wayna Picchu was the residence for the high priest of the ancient city. This challenging hike takes 2-3 hours and climbs approximately 1,200 feet from the base at Machu Picchu, ascending a steep face using stairs and cables for support. The hike is not recommended for guests with physical limitations or those with a fear of heights. Guests who do not wish to tackle Wayna Picchu will explore elsewhere with a local guide, visiting additional temple sites. Should entrance tickets for Wayna Picchu be sold out, an equally challenging hike to the top of Machu Picchu Mountain will be available.

This afternoon, make the return journey to Cusco by train and bus, stopping en route to explore Ollantaytambo, a small rural town surrounded by steep terraced mountainsides. Ollantaytambo sits atop traditional Inca foundations and is one of the best surviving examples of Inca city planning. Enjoy a farewell dinner together in Cusco this evening.

Day 6: Sacsayhuaman / Lima / Depart

This morning we head just outside Cusco to explore the ruins at Sacsayhuaman, where we witness one of the most impressive examples of Inca walls found in the region. The site is still enveloped in mystery, and we ponder how the Incas moved these enormous stones to this site without the advantage of wheeled carts, and how they managed to fit such large, perfectly honed granite stones together so tightly that a pocketknife blade cannot be inserted between them. We’ll have lunch in Cusco, then fly to Lima late this afternoon where you will either meet your homeward flight this evening, or transfer to our airport hotel to spend the night prior to the start of your Galapagos or Amazon adventure (for pre-trip extensions).