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Insider's Guide to Peru

 SHARE*Travel Advisor***Gregory Rhoney**[CONTACT GREGORY](#)

Peru wraps a mix of history, flavor, and epic scenery into one trip. Lima kicks things off with coastal views and one of the best food scenes in Latin America. From there, the Sacred Valley offers a slower pace with local markets, farming villages, and wide-open landscapes. Cusco

blends historic charm with Incan roots, serving as the cultural hub before the big finale: Machu Picchu. This itinerary suits adventurous couples, culture lovers, and active travelers ready for high altitudes and unforgettable moments.

Expect stunning views, rich traditions and a balance of city energy and Andean calm. Read on to find out where to stay, what to do, and how to plan a trip through Peru.

Need to know



Image courtesy of Sol y Luna

Locals are warm and welcoming, but it's important to respect cultural norms. Dress modestly at churches or sacred sites, and always ask before taking someone's photo.

Altitude in Cusco, the Sacred Valley, and even some hikes can sneak up on you. Give yourself time to adjust, drink lots of water, and consider coca tea or oxygen on arrival. Bottled water is a must, and stomach issues can happen even at high-end restaurants. Travel insurance is recommended, especially if visiting remote areas or hiking trails.

Book ahead for high-demand experiences like the Inca Trail, Machu Picchu tickets, luxury train seats, and top restaurants in Lima. And don't forget the essentials: Bring a plug adapter and remember that time is listed in 24-hour format.

Currency: Peru uses the Sol (PEN). Credit cards are widely accepted, but keep cash on hand for smaller markets and remote areas. ATMs are widespread. A 10% tip is standard in restaurants.

Languages: Many Peruvians are soft-spoken, warm, and proud of their heritage. A respectful tone and basic Spanish go a long way wherever you go.

- **Key phrases:** hello / goodbye (*hola / chao*), good morning (*buenos días*), thank you (*gracias*), please (*por favor*), yes / no (*sí / no*), excuse me / sorry (*disculpe / lo siento*), how are you? (*¿cómo estás?*), I don't speak Spanish (*no hablo Español*).

Airports: Lima's main airport (LIM) is the country's central hub. Most travelers pass through here en route to Cusco, the Sacred Valley, or beyond. Direct flights are available from major US cities like Los Angeles, New York, Dallas, Atlanta, and Miami. More options connect through Bogotá, Panama City, and Mexico City.

For flights to the Sacred Valley, Cusco, and Machu Picchu, the nearest airport is Alejandro Velasco Astete International Airport (CUZ) in Cusco. Direct flights are available between other Peruvian cities like Lima and Arequipa, with international flights connecting La Paz, Santiago de Chile, and Bogotá.

Transportation:

- **Lima:** Private transfers are best for airport pickups and traveling between neighborhoods. Many hotels also offer reliable shuttle services. Uber Black is recommended for comfort and safety as you explore the city. Stick to walkable neighborhoods like Miraflores and Barranco during daylight hours.
- **Sacred Valley:** Many hotels and lodges offer shuttle or private transfer services to key sites like Ollantaytambo, Pisac, and Urubamba. Hiring a private driver is common and recommended for flexibility to explore the valley. Shared vans and *colectivos* do operate between towns, but can be crowded and less predictable.

- **Cusco:** Most travelers prefer private drivers or hotel shuttle services for ease and safety, especially on winding mountain roads. Guided tours often include private transfers, especially for visits to the Sacred Valley and Machu Picchu. Walking is popular within Cusco's historic center, but transportation is needed for excursions outside the city.
- **Machu Picchu:** Most travelers reach Machu Picchu by train from Cusco or the Sacred Valley. Luxury options like the Belmond Hiram Bingham or panoramic Vistadome trains offer a scenic ride to Aguas Calientes, the town at the base of the site. Hotels often arrange private transfers to the train stations. From Aguas Calientes, a short shuttle takes you up the mountain to Machu Picchu's entrance. Guided tours are highly recommended.

Best time to visit: Peru is a year-round destination, but the dry season (May to October) is ideal for clear skies, smooth travel, and hiking. Machu Picchu is best in May or June, when landscapes are green and crowds are lighter. July and August are peak months with crisp weather and lots of visitors, while September and October offer fewer tourists and mild days. From November to March, expect summer warmth along the coast and rain in the Andes and Amazon, great for city breaks or culinary travel, as some trekking routes may be closed.

Ideal length of stay: 7 to 10 days allows plenty of time to cover Lima, Cusco, and Machu Picchu at a relaxed pace. Add a few extra days for Lake Titicaca or the Amazon.

Signature dishes:

- **Lima and the coast:** *ceviche* (Peru's national dish; fresh white fish cured in lime juice with red onion, chili, and sweet potato), *anticuchos* (grilled skewers, often beef heart, marinated in ají panca and served with potatoes or corn), *tacu tacu* (a crispy rice-and-bean pancake topped with steak, seafood, or fried egg), *suspiro limeño* (a creamy caramel dessert topped with meringue, born in Lima's historic taverns), and *pisco* (Peru's signature spirit; try it in a classic Pisco Sour).
- **Cusco and the Andes:** *rocoto relleno* (spicy Andean peppers stuffed with meat, cheese, and egg, often baked in a clay oven), *quinotto* (a high-altitude take on risotto, made with local quinoa and Andean herbs), *alpaca steak* (lean, tender, and often served grilled with native potatoes or *uchucuta* sauce), and *choclo con queso* (oversized Andean corn with slices of salty fresh cheese).

What to wear: Layers are key. In Lima, light cottons and linens work well, with smart-casual dresses or button-downs for evenings. In Cusco and the Sacred Valley, pack for cool mornings and warmer afternoons. Sweaters, jackets, and sturdy shoes are a must. If you venture to the Amazon, opt for breathable long sleeves, quick-dry fabrics, and mosquito protection.

Lima

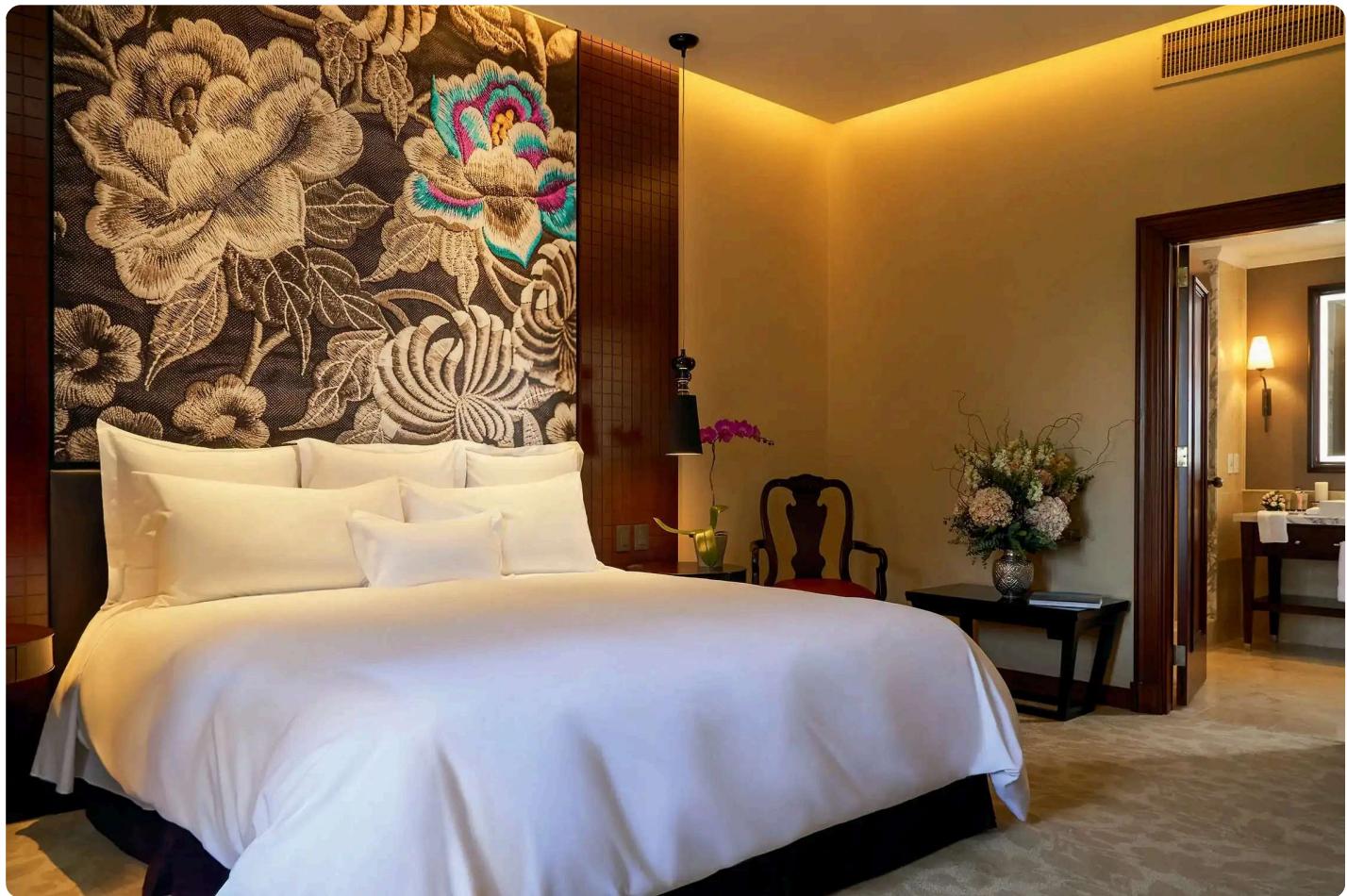


Image courtesy of Country Club Lima Hotel

Peru's coastal capital mixes edginess and elegance. Enjoy a strong coffee in artsy Barranco, followed by gallery hopping and world-class dining in Miraflores. It's creative, complex, and quietly confident, with some of the freshest ceviche on the planet.

Where to stay

Miraflores Park, A Belmond Hotel: Set along the cliffs of upscale Miraflores, rooms are spacious and elegant but relaxed. Days start with a swim in the rooftop pool overlooking the ocean, followed by fresh ceviche or a walk through nearby Parque del Amor.

- **Fora's Belmond Bellini Club** partner perks include a hotel credit, daily breakfast, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Country Club Lima Hotel: Classic elegance and history in upscale San Isidro. It embodies a grand estate with marble floors, antique furnishings, and original Peruvian artwork

throughout. The outdoor terrace and golf club next door add to the tucked-away, residential feel.

- **Fora Perks** include a \$100 food& beverage credit, daily breakfast, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Hotel B Lima: In Barranco, Lima's bohemian, coastal neighborhood, this boutique stay feels both historic and effortlessly cool. Housed in a beautifully restored mansion, rooms are thoughtfully styled, with high ceilings, curated artwork, and old-world charm.

- **Fora Perks** include a \$100 hotel credit, welcome amenity, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Atemporal: Tucked away on a quiet street in Miraflores, this 1940s house-turned-hideaway feels like staying in a friend's unfussy home. There's no big lobby or restaurant, instead there's garden breakfasts, an honesty bar, and a house car for exploring the city.

- **Fora Perks** include a \$25 hotel credit, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Sacred Valley



Image courtesy of Inkaterra Hacienda Urubamba

Tucked between Cusco and Machu Picchu, the Sacred Valley unfolds in layers of terraced hills, sleepy towns, and boutique retreats. Expect early-morning yoga facing the peaks, alpacas grazing nearby, and time to fully unplug.

Where to stay

Sol y Luna: Surrounded by gardens filled with native flora and framed by the Andes, this retreat blends rustic charm and refined comfort. Traditional adobe architecture with modern touches and private patios combine with warm, attentive service.

- **Fora Perks** include a \$100 hotel credit, daily breakfast, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Andenia Boutique Hotel: A fresh, contemporary escape set against mountain backdrops. The hotel combines sleek architecture with warm, inviting spaces that highlight Peruvian craftsmanship. Friendly staff help to perfectly balance adventure with comfort and style.

- **Fora Perks** include a \$25 hotel credit, welcome amenity, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Inkaterra Hacienda Urubamba: Set on a private estate with sweeping views, it blends Spanish old-world charm with refined elegance. Adobe walls, exposed beams, handwoven textiles, and oversized windows frame the Andes.

- **Fora Perks** include a complimentary 60-minute massage for two, daily breakfast, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

CUSCO



Image courtesy of Monasterio, A Belmond Hotel, Cusco

A city where altitude meets attitude, Cusco is steeped in Incan heritage. It's the kind of place that invites slow wandering from handwoven markets to sun-warmed plazas, coca tea in hand, and Andean culture all around you.

Where to stay

Palacio Del Inka, A Luxury Collection Hotel: A gem in the heart of Cusco with Incan ruins beneath your feet. The rooms are cozy yet sophisticated, and the spa treatments use local ingredients. It's full of character, and an easy base to explore from.

- **Fora's Marriott STARS** partner perks include a \$100 hotel credit, welcome amenity, daily breakfast, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Monasterio, A Belmond Hotel, Cusco: Set in a restored monastery in the historic center, it's perfect to soak up Cusco's rich culture without splurging much. Cloistered courtyards and stone arches create peaceful vibes, and the rooms blend traditional décor with modern comforts.

- **Fora's Belmond Bellini Club** partner perks include a hotel credit, daily breakfast, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Palacio Nazarenas, A Belmond Hotel: Once a former convent and palace, it mixes historic charm with modern touches. More boutique and intimate, rooms are still spacious, some with private terraces or plunge pools. It's refined comfort wrapped in history.

- **Fora's Belmond Bellini Club** partner perks include a hotel credit, daily breakfast, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Machu Picchu



Image courtesy of Sumaq Machu Picchu Hotel

Whether you hike the last stretch or arrive by train, Machu Picchu deserves its own moment, with its towering peaks, misty ruins, and a silence that says more than words. It's a sacred, cinematic place that's just as powerful for spiritual travelers as trekkers alike.

Where to stay

Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel: Set within 12 acres of cloud forest just a short ride from the entrance to Machu Picchu, this property feels more like a private village than a hotel. Stone pathways, gardens, and whitewashed casitas make it an immersive, atmospheric escape.

- **Fora Perks** include a complimentary 60-minute massage for two, daily breakfast, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Sumaq Machu Picchu Hotel: One of the few upscale hotels in Aguas Calientes that blends convenience with a polished, Peruvian feel. Thoughtful design details, regional ingredients, traditional experiences, and spacious rooms are just a short walk from the train station.

- **Fora Perks** include a complimentary 50-minute massage for two, daily breakfast, an upgrade, and extended check-in/out whenever possible.

Cruising to and around Peru



Peru's best cruises aren't on the ocean, they're deep in the Amazon. Aqua Expeditions and Delfin Amazon Cruises (Relais & Châteaux) offer luxury, all-inclusive river sailings from Iquitos. Expect gourmet food, expert naturalists, and daily jungle excursions by skiff.

Timing matters. High water season (December to May) lets skiffs glide deeper into flooded rainforest, perfect for spotting wildlife, though fewer trails are walkable. Low water season (June to November) opens up more paths for jungle hikes and secluded river beaches, with slightly reduced waterway access.

Notable cruise lines

Aqua Expeditions: Luxurious and deeply immersive, Aqua blends sleek design with five-star service aboard small, design-forward river vessels. Think naturalist-led skiff excursions by

day, fine dining and cocktails under the stars by night.

- **Fora Perks** include one 50-minute massage per person.

Delfin Amazon Cruises (Relais & Châteaux): Boutique and indulgent, Delfin's vessels combine warm Peruvian hospitality with Relais & Châteaux touchpoints. They're known for their stylish open-air suites, locally inspired cuisine, and a strong sustainability ethos.

History and culture



Peru's history is rich and layered, stretching back thousands of years. Anchored by the mighty Inca Empire, their engineering genius still stuns visitors at sites like Machu Picchu, Ollantaytambo, and Sacsayhuamán. Long before the Spanish arrived, the Sacred Valley served as the agricultural and spiritual heart of the Inca civilization. Cusco was its imperial capital, today still revered by locals as the "navel of the world." In Lima, Spanish colonial influence blends with Indigenous traditions and pre-Columbian ruins like Huaca Pucllana.

Across the country, Andean rituals continue to thrive, from the annual *Inti Raymi* sun festival in Cusco to sacred coca leaf ceremonies and offerings to *Pachamama* (Mother Earth). Even today, Quechua and Aymara communities carry forward ancestral knowledge in everything from weaving techniques to agricultural cycles. Whether witnessing the colorful traditions of Puno's Virgin of Candelaria festival or walking among the Nazca Lines, Peru offers not just a journey through space but through centuries of resilience, reverence, and cultural continuity.

Cultural celebrations & events

- ***Carnaval (February)***: Dance and music break out across Peru, especially in Cajamarca and Puno. Be prepared for lively water fights—great fun, but messy.
- ***Fiesta de la Candelaria (Puno, early February)***: One of the largest folk festivals in South America with dance competitions, Andean-Catholic rituals, and non-stop music.
- ***Semana Santa / Holy Week (March/April)***: Deeply spiritual with striking processions, especially in Ayacucho. A reflective and photogenic time to visit, but cities can get full.
- ***Inti Raymi / Incan Festival of the Sun (Cusco, June 24)***: This grand festival is a full-day reenactment with colorful parades, ancestral ceremonies, and packed plazas.
- ***Virgen del Carmen (Paucartambo, July 15–18)***: A masked, multi-day Andean festival just outside Cusco that's a wild and reverent mix of Catholicism and Indigeneity.
- ***Fiestas Patrias / Peruvian Independence Day (July 28–29)***: Patriotic energy takes over Peru with parades, concerts, fireworks, and packed public spaces.

What to do in Peru



Image courtesy of Andean Explorer, A Belmond Train

From high-altitude hikes to coastal food, Peru delivers a mix of standout experiences that capture the country's culture, landscapes, and personality.

Lima

- **Miraflores and Barranco:** Land in Lima and ease in with two nights in Miraflores or Barranco, the perfect neighborhoods for coastal air, sea-level comfort, and time to adjust before the Andes.
- **Art:** Stroll the Malecón at golden hour for ocean views, then head into Barranco or Miraflores to explore street art, local galleries, or contemporary works at MAC Lima.
- **Museo Oro del Perú (Gold Museum):** Visit this museum for over 20,000 artifacts of gold, textiles, and weapons; a lot date back to Pre-Columbian cultures.
- **Historic center:** In the historic center, visit the grand Plaza de Armas, Lima Cathedral, and the hauntingly beautiful San Francisco Monastery and Catacombs of Lima.
- **Huaca Pucllana:** For a pre-Inca contrast, take a guided walk through the ancient adobe pyramid of Huaca Pucllana in the middle of Miraflores.
- **Food markets:** Wander Mercado de Surquillo or the Saturday bioferia in Miraflores, both bursting with local produce, native potatoes, and colorful spices.

- **Cooking class:** A cooking class is a flavorful deep dive into Peruvian staples like *ají amarillo* and *choclo*, usually capped with a pisco sour.
- **Shopping:** Save time for Barranco's shopping boutiques, where handwoven alpaca pieces and up-and-coming Peruvian designers keep things stylish and soulful.

Sacred Valley

- **Historical sites:** Explore the Sacred Valley's ancient past at Pisac and Ollantaytambo, where terraced hills and stone fortresses tell stories of Incan ingenuity.
- **Villages:** Visit nearby villages to see traditional weaving in action, with brightly dyed wool spun on handmade looms, often passed down through generations.
- **Farms:** Stop for a hearty Andean lunch or visit a community farm, where alpaca herders share stories, smiles, and beautifully woven goods.
- **Hiking:** Walk quiet trails along the Urubamba River or head deeper into the hills to find waterfalls and picnic-perfect lookouts.
- **Landscapes:** Don't skip Moray's circular terraces and the salt pans of Maras, two of the valley's most striking and storied scenery.
- **Recharging:** Slow down with an herbal massage, mountaintop yoga, or a soak in the valley's stillness.

Cusco

- **City center:** Wander Cusco's cobblestone streets where colonial façades meet colorful markets, textile shops, and handmade treasures.
- **Culture:** Explore ancient sites like Sacsayhuamán and Qorikancha, or dive into the buzz of San Pedro Market for street snacks and local flavors.
- **Active excursions:** Short hikes around Cusco offer sweeping views, or hop on a bike through the Sacred Valley and stop wherever the mood (or the scenery) strikes.
- **Relaxation:** When it's time to recharge, try a local spa that uses native herbs and traditions. Sip coca tea in a sun-drenched plaza and soak up the Andean rhythm.

Hiking around Machu Picchu

- **Classic Inca Trail:** The most iconic route to Machu Picchu, this four-day trek weaves past hidden ruins and misty mountain passes. It's popular, so expect company and be sure to book permits months ahead. For many, however, it's a bucket-list experience.

- **Train and one-day hike:** Ride the train to Aguas Calientes, then opt for a shorter hike to the site. It's a flexible way to get a taste of the trail without the full commitment.
- **Salkantay Trail:** A scenic alternative with far fewer crowds, this high-altitude route delivers sweeping Andean views. It skips the Inca ruins but makes up for it in raw, natural beauty.
- **Huayna Picchu:** A steep, switchback climb that's worth the extra permit. There's limited daily access that keeps it quiet, and the panoramic views of Machu Picchu are some of the best around.

Sample itinerary

- **Days 1–2 (Sacred Valley):** Fly into Cusco and head straight to the Sacred Valley to ease into the altitude. Stay at a boutique lodge surrounded by terraced hillsides and take your time visiting local villages, markets, and Incan sites like Ollantaytambo or Pisac.
- **Days 3–4 (Machu Picchu):** Catch the train to Aguas Calientes and spend two nights here to make the most of your time at Machu Picchu. Hike up for sunrise, visit with a guide, and tackle Huayna Picchu for panoramic views.
- **Days 5–6 (Cusco):** Take the train back to Cusco and soak up the high-altitude charm. Wander cobblestone streets, visit Sacsayhuamán, sip coca tea in quiet courtyards, and browse artisan shops for handwoven alpaca pieces.
- **Day 7 (Lima):** Fly to Lima for one last night. Stay in Barranco or Miraflores, stroll along the Malecón, and toast your trip with a final pisco sour and seafood dinner by the ocean.

Where to eat in Peru



Image courtesy of Palacio Del Inka, A Luxury Collection Hotel, Cusco

Peru's food scene is as layered as its landscapes, blending Indigenous roots with global flavors. These spots are worth planning your day around.

Lima

- **Central:** Ranked among the world's top restaurants, the tasting menu journeys through Peru's ecosystems; each course tells a regional story.
- **Kjolle:** Bright, elegant, and ingredient-first, Kjolle offers a softer, more intuitive version of fine dining with lesser-known native ingredients, served in an airy space.
- **Mérito:** A narrow, warmly lit spot with exposed brick, just a handful of tables, and an open kitchen that plays with Venezuelan and Peruvian flavors.
- **Siete:** A Miraflores hidden gem with clean, contemporary interiors and a focus on seasonality and a menu that reads global-Peruvian.
- **La Mar:** A Miraflores lunch institution where locals and insiders flock for ceviche, the catch-of-the-day, and everything else seafood.
- **Cosme:** Fresh and laid-back with a bold, graphic interior, Cosme serves up modern comfort food with a Peruvian soul.

- **Panchita:** A celebration of hearty Criollo flavors, centered on wood-fired meats, smoky *anticuchos*, and comforting classics.
- **Astrid y Gastón:** An icon of modern Peruvian cuisine, this San Isidro institution delivers inventive dishes in a restored hacienda.

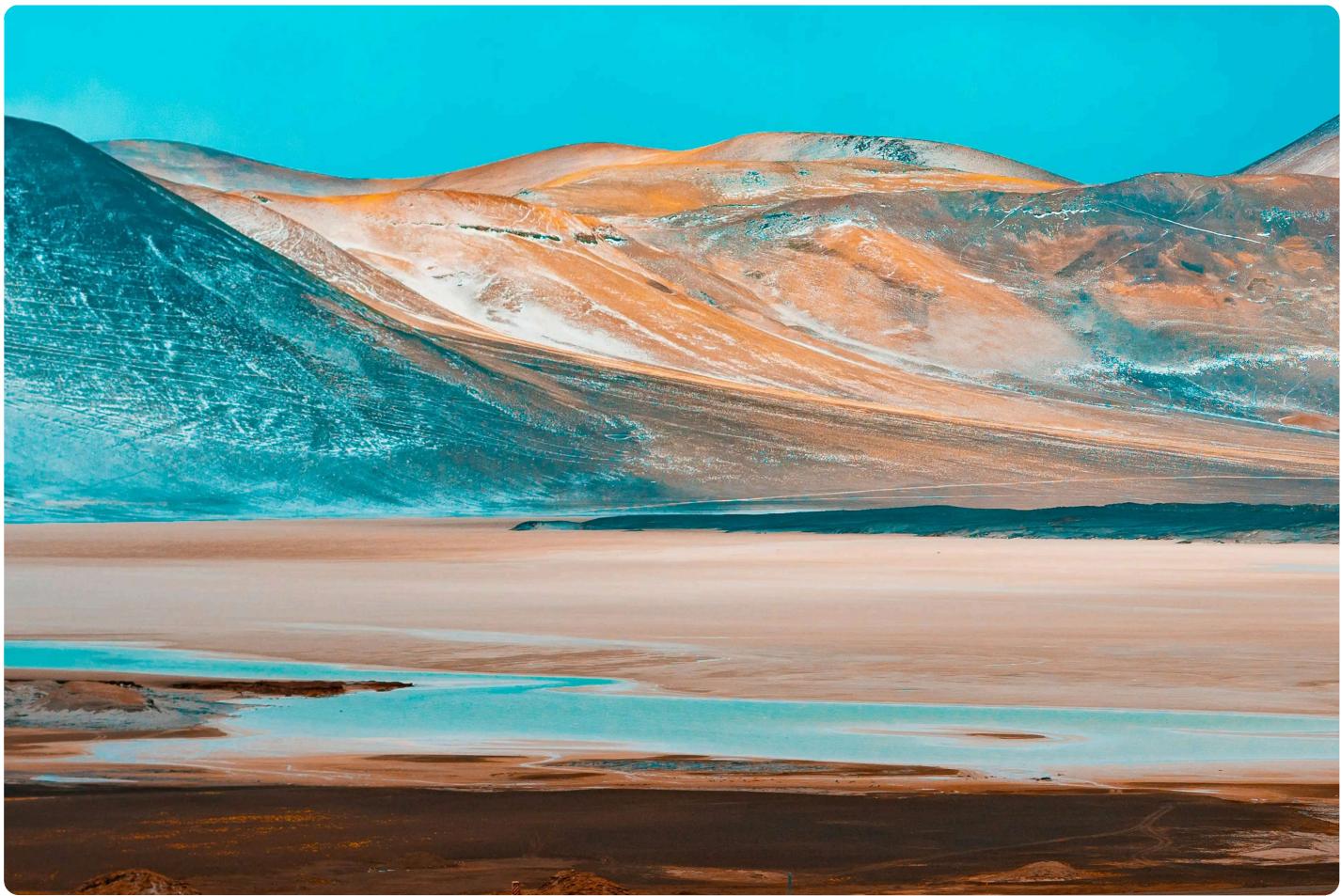
Sacred Valley

- **El Huerto:** This riverside indoor/outdoor gem is a must-visit for farm-to-table fare.
- **El Albergue Restaurant:** Located at the historic train station in Ollantaytambo, it offers a cozy setting with traditional Andean dishes made from local ingredients.
- **Wayra Restaurant:** Set in a garden in Urubamba, it focuses on organic, sustainable cuisine with inventive twists on Peruvian classics.
- **Chaqchao Organic Chocolate:** More than just a chocolate shop, Chaqchao serves artisanal organic chocolate paired with gourmet coffee and small plates.

Cusco

- **MAP Café:** Inside the Museum of pre-Columbian Art, this chic spot serves a refined tasting menu that celebrates indigenous ingredients with modern flair.
- **Cicciolina:** This lively bistro in the historic center is a local favorite for its unfussy menu and cozy, bohemian atmosphere.
- **Chicha:** Elevated Peruvian classics with a focus on regional, seasonal produce.
- **Uchu Peruvian Steakhouse:** For meat lovers, premium cuts are grilled to perfection alongside Andean-inspired sauces in a sleek, contemporary setting.
- **Pachapapa:** A rustic gem tucked in the San Blas neighborhood, Pachapapa specializes in hearty Andean fare like roasted guinea pig and alpaca steak cooked over an open flame, served in a charming courtyard with warm candlelight.

Trips to add on



These add-on destinations pair beautifully with Peru's ancient sites and dramatic landscapes, offering even more opportunities for nature, culture, and immersive exploration.

Amazon jungle lodges (1-hour flight to Puerto Maldonado): For a deep rainforest experience, stay at eco-lodges like Inkaterra Reserva Amazonica or Refugio Amazonas. Guests can explore the jungle canopy, spot wildlife, and unwind to the sounds of the Amazon.

Amazon river cruise (1.5 to 2 hours by flight to Iquitos): Cruise the Peruvian Amazon in comfort aboard small ships like Aqua or Delfin. With daily excursions into the jungle, these itineraries combine wildlife, nature, and a boutique luxury onboard experience.

Colca Canyon (1-hour flight to Arequipa + 3–4 hr drive): One of the world's deepest canyons and home to iconic Andean condors, Colca Canyon is a dramatic detour worth taking. Pair it with Arequipa's baroque architecture and snowcapped volcano views.

Uyuni Salt Flats (flights via La Paz or Cusco): Step into a surreal dreamscape with a multi-day adventure across Bolivia's salt flats. Whether you choose the design-forward Kachi Lodge

or a high-altitude Explora itinerary, it's a paradise for photographers and adventurers.

Atacama Desert, Chile (flight via Lima or La Paz): With its lunar terrain, vivid sunsets, and luxury desert lodges, the Atacama offers stillness and space unlike anywhere else. It's a natural next step for travelers weaving together a multi-country Andean journey.

Galápagos Islands (flight via Lima or Quito): A wildlife haven that feels like its own world. Whether by yacht or eco-lodge, the Galápagos is an unforgettable extension, especially great for families, explorers, or anyone looking to get up close to nature in its purest form.

If not Peru...



If you love Peru's ancient civilizations, sweeping landscapes, and immersive hikes but want to branch out, these destinations offer a similar escape of culture, history, and adventure.

Bolivia—Uyuni, La Paz, Lake Titicaca: Starkly beautiful and wildly remote, Bolivia's salt flats, highland cities, and sacred lakes deliver a raw, rewarding kind of travel. Combine it with the Andes or the edge of the Amazon for full immersion.

Guatemala—Antigua, Lake Atitlán, Tikal: Misty lakes ringed by volcanoes, Mayan ruins rising from the jungle, and vibrant local markets. It's culturally layered and visually stunning, with fewer crowds than Peru.

México—Oaxaca and Chiapas: Earthy, ancestral, and full of flavor. These southern states offer archaeological sites, textile traditions, and a terrain that feels like a lush, tropical cousin to the Sacred Valley.

Nepal—Kathmandu Valley and the Himalayas: If the Inca Trail sparked something in your client, Nepal takes it further. Trek past ancient stupas and terraced hillsides into spiritual highland communities where the mountains still guide daily life.

Morocco—High Atlas and Imperial Cities: A meeting of mountains, medinas, and desert magic. For travelers craving rich cultural storytelling alongside dramatic natural beauty, Morocco hits a familiar yet totally different note.

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