

Welcome to Peru, the heart of the Andes and a cradle of ancient civilizations!

**SNAILTRAILOUTDOORS** 



# Why Choose Snailtrailoutdoors?





#### **CUSTOM TRAVEL PLANS**

WE CREATE PERSONALIZED
ITINERARIES WITH PRIVATE TOUR
OPTIONS AND EXPERT ADVICE ON
TICKETS AND MACHU PICCHU
CIRCUITS—MAKING YOUR TRIP
STRESS-FREE.



#### **INSIDER KNOWLEDGE**

WITH FIRSTHAND EXPERIENCE OF PERU'S TOP DESTINATIONS, WE PROVIDE THE BEST TIPS ON ROUTES, ACCOMMODATIONS, AND HIDDEN GEMS.



#### **SEAMLESS TRAVEL**

WE GUIDE YOU THROUGH TRAIN SCHEDULES, ENTRANCE TICKETS, AND LOCAL CULTURE, ENSURING YOUR TRIP RUNS SMOOTHLY AND MEMORABLY.



# **Entry Requirements:**

Make sure your passport is valid for at least six months beyond your return date, as many countries, including Peru, require this for entry. While citizens of most countries, such as the U.S., Canada, and the U.K., do not need a visa for short tourist stays (up to 90 days), travelers from other countries may require one. It is crucial to verify visa requirements ahead of time to avoid delays or issues at immigration.

Additionally, keep records of your travel itinerary, including flight details, accommodation confirmations, and return travel plans. Having both digital and physical copies of these documents can be helpful in case of lost items or connectivity issues.

To ensure your valuables are secure, it's recommended to store essential travel items in a secure, easily accessible place, such as a travel pouch, cross-body bag, or waist pouch. These essentials include:

PASSPORT + C + C

- Passport
- Wallet (cash and credit cards)
- Phone (with offline maps and important contact numbers)
- Travel documents (printed copies of flight and hotel reservations)
- Emergency contacts and travel insurance details

Avoid carrying large amounts of cash in one place and distribute your money between your main pouch and a backup location, such as a hidden pocket or secondary bag. In crowded areas, such as markets, train stations, or tourist sites, be mindful of pickpockets and keep your pouch or bag close to your body.

By staying organized and prepared, you'll reduce stress and minimize potential setbacks during your journey.

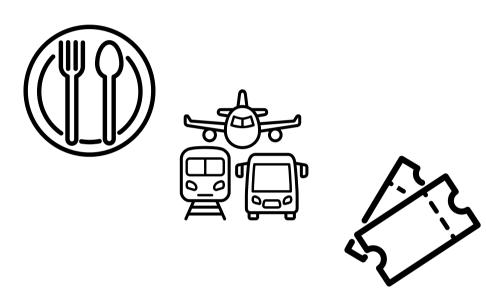
# **Currency and Costs:**

The local currency in Peru is the Peruvian Sol (PEN). As of early 2025, the exchange rate is approximately 1 USD = 3.7 to 3.8 PEN, though this can fluctuate. Major cities like Cusco, Lima, and Aguas Calientes generally accept credit cards at hotels, restaurants, and large shops. However, it's essential to carry cash when traveling to rural areas or smaller towns, where card payments may not be available.

Here are a few rough cost estimates to help plan your budget:

- Meals:
  - Budget meal: 10-20 PEN (\$3-\$6)
  - Mid-range restaurant: 30-60 PEN (\$8-\$16)
  - High-end dining: 80-150 PEN (\$22-\$40)
- Transportation:
  - Uber in Cusco: 10-20 PEN (\$3-\$6) for short trips
  - Bus rides: 2-5 PEN (\$0.50-\$1.50)
  - o Train to Machu Picchu: 150-300 PEN (\$40-\$80), depending on class and route
- Entrance Fees:
  - Machu Picchu entrance: 152 PEN (around \$40)
  - Huayna Picchu hike add-on: 200 PEN (\$53)

ATMs are widely available in tourist areas, but many charge withdrawal fees, so it's best to withdraw larger amounts at once to minimize fees. Additionally, carry smaller denominations of cash, as many vendors and taxi drivers may not have change for larger bills.





## **Local Culture**

English is common in major tourist areas but less so in rural regions. Learning basic Spanish phrases can improve your experience. Phrases like "¿Cuánto cuesta?" (How much does it cost?), "Gracias" (Thank you), and "No, gracias" (No, thank you) are especially helpful when dealing with vendors. Apps like Duolingo can help you prepare.

Respect local customs and sacred sites, like Machu Picchu and indigenous villages. Avoid touching ruins, and ask permission before photographing people, as many places hold spiritual significance.

# Quick Cultural Tips:

- Solicitors: Tourist areas have many vendors offering tours and souvenirs. A polite "No, gracias" is usually effective.
- Dining: Meals may take longer to be served, especially in rural areas where everything is freshly made.
- Transportation: Always negotiate fares in advance. Uber is a the best option in Lima and Cusco.
- Market Shopping: Haggling is common but keep it friendly. Offer around 70-80% of the asking price.
- Festivals: The Lord of Miracles (Señor de los Milagros) is Peru's largest religious festival in October. Crowds fill the streets for processions honoring a painting of Christ that survived an earthquake. Arrive early to find a good spot.





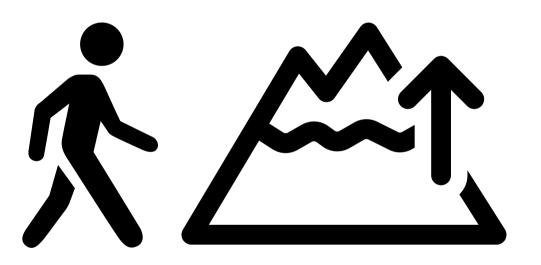




## **Altitude Acclimatization**

Cusco sits at a significant altitude of 11,150 ft—higher than most cities worldwide. Few countries have cities at this elevation, which can make acclimatization challenging for travelers. Symptoms like headaches, fatigue, and shortness of breath are common, especially upon arrival. Allow at least a day to adjust before engaging in strenuous activities.

Stay hydrated, avoid alcohol, and eat light meals to help your body adapt. Many locals recommend coca tea, a traditional remedy for altitude sickness. If symptoms worsen, descend to a lower elevation or seek medical assistance. Machu Picchu itself is lower at 7,970 ft, which may provide some relief after Cusco.



# **Packing List**

Peru's varying climates require layers. Mornings and evenings in Cusco and the Sacred Valley can be cold, while afternoons warm up quickly. Machu Picchu can be humid and rainy, so bring a rain jacket. Key items include comfortable hiking shoes, a reusable water bottle, sunscreen, and a hat to protect against strong UV rays at high altitudes.

Travel light since moving between locations can be challenging with large luggage. The train to Machu Picchu officially limits bags to one small item under 5 kg (11 lbs), although we saw travelers with larger suitcases. Most hotels in Cusco are happy to hold luggage while you visit Machu Picchu or other nearby areas, which is why we booked a hotel to return to after our trip. This service makes packing only the essentials much easier.

Finally, leave room for souvenirs like alpaca textiles, handmade jewelry, and pottery—local markets are full of unique finds!



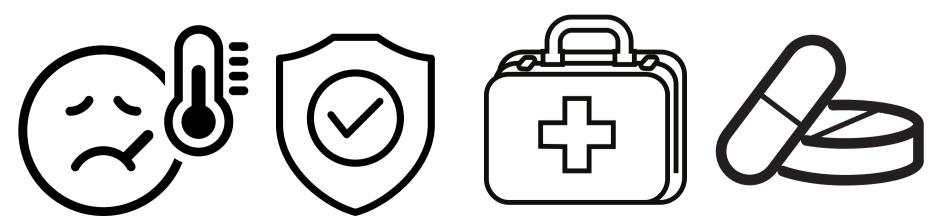
# **Health & Safety**

Stay hydrated to help prevent altitude sickness, especially in high-altitude areas like Cusco. Symptoms such as headaches, fatigue, and dizziness can often be reduced by drinking plenty of water and avoiding alcohol. Locals recommend coca tea, which is widely available, to ease symptoms.

Avoid drinking tap water, even in major cities. Stick to bottled or filtered water, and be cautious with ice and raw foods that may have been rinsed with unfiltered water. Be mindful of what you eat—street food is tempting but can carry a risk of foodborne illness. Stick to freshly cooked, hot meals to reduce the chance of getting sick.

Both Cusco and Machu Picchu felt safe during my trip. I didn't encounter any major safety concerns, even when walking through markets and tourist areas. However, as in any tourist destination, it's wise to keep your valuables secure, especially in crowded areas where pickpocketing can occur.

Pack a first aid kit with essentials such as pain relievers, altitude medication, anti-diarrheal tablets, and any personal prescription medications. Don't forget sunscreen and insect repellent, particularly for humid areas like the Amazon or Aguas Calientes. Taking these precautions will help ensure you stay healthy and safe throughout your adventure!





Fly into Lima (Jorge Chávez International Airport - LIM), the main international gateway to Peru. From Lima, take a domestic flight to Cusco (Alejandro Velasco Astete Airport - CUZ), which takes about 1.5 hours. Cusco is at a significant altitude (11,150 ft), so it's crucial to allow at least a day to acclimate to prevent altitude sickness. Use this time to explore Cusco's historic center, try local cuisine, and take things slow before making your way to the Sacred Valley and Machu Picchu.

#### Cities to Visit

time exploring Lima's historic sites, coastal areas, and renowned food scene before continuing to Cusco. We went straight to Cusco after our layover.

• Cusco: This high-altitude hub (11,150 ft) is where you'll likely spend most of your trip. It's rich in history, with sites like

• Lima: All flights to Cusco require a layover in Lima (Jorge Chávez International Airport - LIM). You can choose to spend

- Cusco: This high-altitude hub (11,150 ft) is where you'll likely spend most of your trip. It's rich in history, with sites like Sacsayhuamán and the Plaza de Armas, and serves as the gateway to the Sacred Valley and Machu Picchu.
- Aguas Calientes (Machu Picchu Pueblo): This small town is the access point to Machu Picchu. From here, you can hike or take a shuttle to the entrance of the site.
- Ollantaytambo: A charming town in the Sacred Valley, known for its Inca ruins and picturesque streets. We passed it on the train to Aguas Calientes, but I've heard it's well worth stopping to explore.

Transportation

**Cities to Visit** 

**Travel Overview** 

Uber is a reliable and safe option for airport transfers and city travel in both Lima and Cusco. It's convenient, affordable, and safer than accepting offers from taxi solicitors at the airport, which should generally be avoided. In more remote areas, such as the Sacred Valley or Aguas Calientes, Uber is not available. You'll need to rely on taxis, colectivos (shared vans), or pre-arranged transportation. Always agree on taxi fares beforehand, as meters are rarely used.

A wide range of accommodations is available, including hostels, guesthouses, and boutique hotels to fit various budgets and preferences. I used <u>Booking.com</u> for reservations, which worked smoothly. It's best to stay near Cusco's Centro Histórico and Plaza de Armas, where you'll find easy access to restaurants, markets, and attractions.

Many hotels in Cusco offer luggage storage, which is especially convenient for multi-day trips to Machu Picchu or the Sacred Valley. This is helpful due to the luggage restrictions on trains to Machu Picchu, which limit passengers to smaller bags. Staying centrally also makes it easier to navigate the city on foot.

# Food

**Stay Options** 

roasted or fried.

There's also a surprising number of great pizzerias, especially in Cusco, catering to both locals and tourists. Street food is abundant but choose vendors with high turnover and freshly cooked items to minimize food safety risks. Meals in rural areas are typically prepared fresh, so wait times may be longer, but the quality is well worth it.

Peru offers excellent fresh cuisine with plenty of affordable options. I was very impressed by the variety and quality of dishes.

You'll find delicious alpaca meat, trout, and duck dishes. For the adventurous, cuy (guinea pig) is a traditional delicacy, often

# Train Tickets

Train tickets are essential for visiting Machu Picchu. Both PeruRail and IncaRail operate scenic trains from Ollantaytambo and Cusco to Aguas Calientes (Machu Picchu Pueblo). The journey takes 1.5 to 3.5 hours, depending on your departure point. Tickets can sell out quickly, especially during peak travel seasons (May to September), so it's important to book well in advance.

There are various train classes, ranging from budget-friendly options to luxury services with panoramic views and meal service.

Visiting Machu Picchu requires an entrance ticket, which should be purchased well in advance. Tickets are limited by daily quotas, especially for add-ons like Huayna Picchu and Machu Picchu Mountain, which often sell out during peak seasons. Your ticket determines which circuit you can follow within the site.

There are four main circuits, each offering a different experience:

- Circuit 3: This circuit, paired with the Huayna Picchu hike, was the most exciting in my experience. The hike is steep and challenging but rewards you with breathtaking views and a sense of adventure. Circuit 3 itself covers key lower-level areas, including the main plaza and terraces.
- Circuit 4: Another lower-level circuit with easy access to significant structures like the Sacred Rock and surrounding ruins, great for those seeking a less strenuous visit.
- Circuit 1 & 2: These circuits take you along longer routes with panoramic viewpoints, including the Guardhouse and upper terraces. They provide sweeping views of the ruins and surrounding mountains, ideal for capturing iconic photos of Machu Picchu.

You can access Machu Picchu either by hiking from Aguas Calientes (a steep 1.5-2 hour trek) or by shuttle bus. Buses run frequently, departing roughly every 10-15 minutes. Tickets are sold separately in Aguas Calientes, and you'll wait in line according to your ticket time.

During our trip, we encountered a situation where we wanted to change circuits. We paid an official worker 100 PEN to "upgrade" our ticket, which allowed us to explore another route. However, this may not always be an option. Remember to bring your entrance ticket, train ticket, and passport for entry.

#### **Site Entrance Tickets**



Tip: Want a smoother travel experience? Check out my How to Travel Stress-Free Guide for tips on planning, packing, and staying organized!



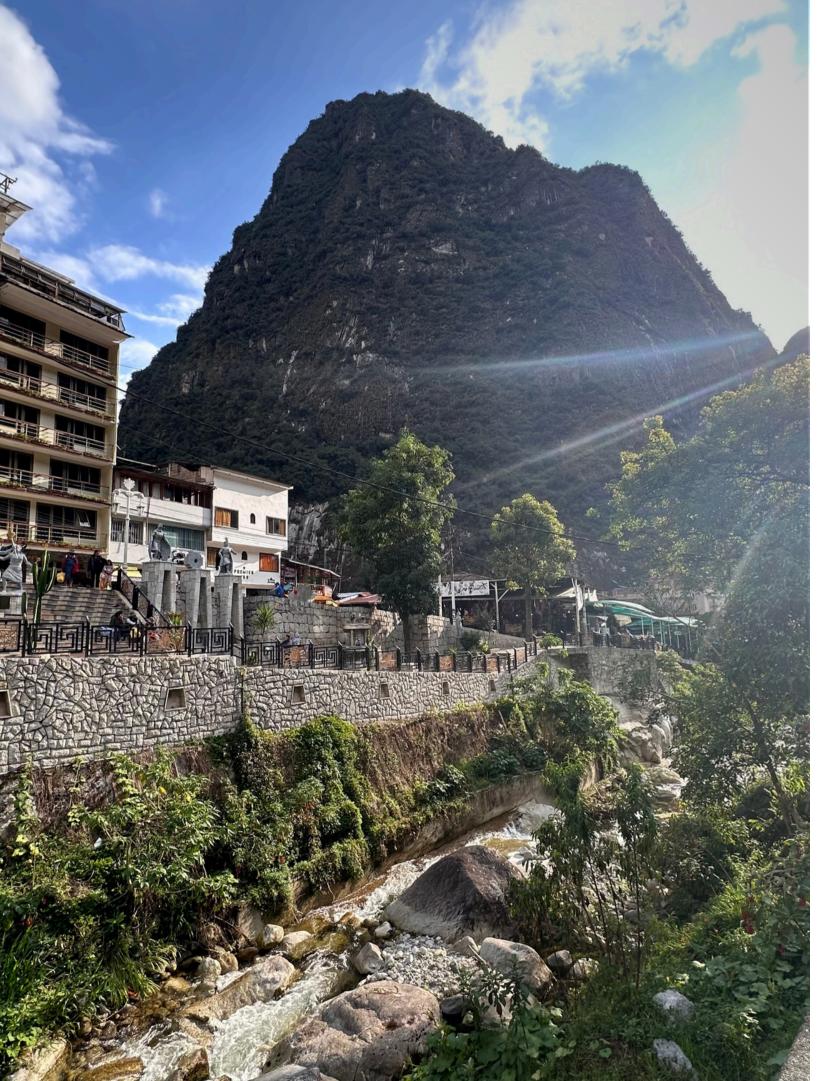
# **Arriving in Cusco**

When you land at Alejandro Velasco Astete Airport, you'll likely be eager to get to your hotel. I recommend using Uber to arrange transportation. It's a reliable and safe option in Cusco. Once you book your ride, be sure to match the license plate and driver's name with what's shown on the app. As you exit the airport, you'll encounter numerous solicitors trying to sell ride services—just politely say, "No, gracias", and wait for your driver to arrive. After arriving at your hotel and checking in, take a moment to settle in. We kept things simple on our first night by casually walking around the block near our hotel. We'd walk a little, stop to take in the sights, then walk some more. It was a relaxed pace, allowing us to ease into the high-altitude environment. While we noticed slight shortness of breath, we didn't feel sick or overly affected by the altitude, which was a relief.

Once you feel comfortable, you can start exploring the city and indulging in everything Cusco has to offer. The Centro Histórico and Plaza de Armas are surrounded by charming streets filled with restaurants, cafes, and markets. There are endless places to choose from, each with its own unique vibe, offering opportunities to try local cuisine, shop for souvenirs, or simply take in the beautiful colonial architecture. Cusco is a city meant for wandering, and it's full of pleasant surprises around every corner.







# Going to Aguas Calientes (Machu Picchu Pueblo)

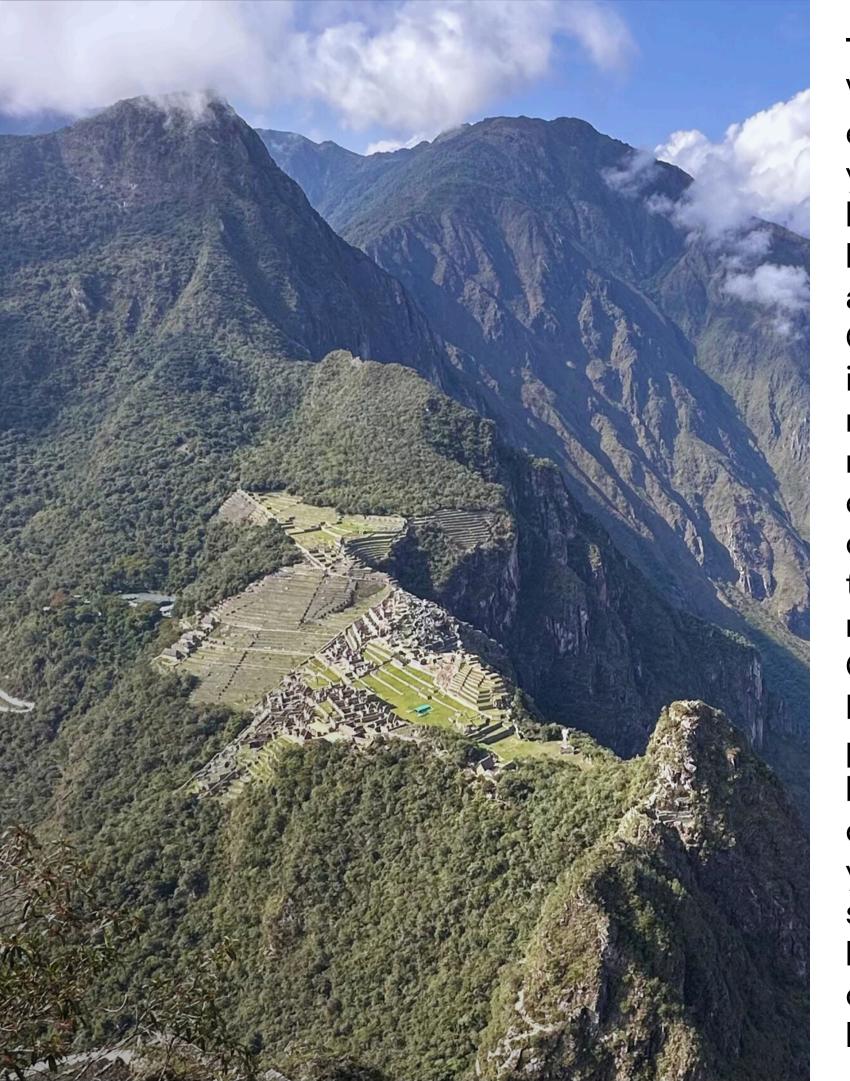
We stayed near San Pedro Train Station in Cusco, which made it easy to catch our train to Aguas Calientes (Machu Picchu Pueblo). This is where the adventure truly begins. The train ride, though a few hours long, is incredibly scenic. You'll pass through the Sacred Valley, with breathtaking views of mountains, rivers, and small villages as the train winds closer to the cloud forests surrounding Machu Picchu.

In Aguas Calientes, we stayed at the <u>Taypikala Boutique Hotel</u>, which offered a beautiful view of the surrounding cloud rainforest. The room was spacious and peaceful, perfect for relaxing after a day of travel. We booked three nights, which gave us ample time to enjoy the area. While you can definitely visit in two nights (arriving one day, visiting Machu Picchu the next, and leaving), we found the extra day allowed us to take things slowly and truly soak in the town's charm.

Aguas Calientes has no road access, so everything is within walking distance. The town is filled with wonderful restaurants, shopping, and bars, offering plenty of opportunities to try local dishes, drinks, and shop for souvenirs. We spent our time exploring the streets, tasting local cuisine, and enjoying the relaxed atmosphere.

One popular attraction is the hot springs, a natural luxury that many visitors rave about. Though we didn't go, it's worth considering if you want to unwind after your hike or tour of Machu Picchu. The springs are located near the edge of town and offer warm, mineral-rich baths surrounded by lush scenery. Overall, Aguas Calientes serves as the perfect base for visiting Machu Picchu, blending relaxation and excitement in a way that complements the grandeur of the ancient site.





### The Wonder of Machu Picchu

Visiting Machu Picchu is a profound experience that lives up to every expectation. The journey to the site itself is awe-inspiring, whether you choose to hike from Aguas Calientes (a steep, challenging 1.5 to 2hour trek) or take the shuttle bus. If you're capable of making the hike, I highly recommend it—it's a demanding climb, but the sense of accomplishment when you reach the entrance is incredibly rewarding. Once inside, you're immediately struck by the ingenuity and intricacies of the Inca civilization. The precision of the stonework is remarkable—massive stones fit together perfectly without the use of mortar, a testament to the Incas' mastery of engineering and their deep understanding of seismic stability. The entire citadel was designed with both functionality and symbolism in mind, with temples, terraces, and agricultural areas perfectly aligned to the surrounding mountains and celestial events.

One of the most unforgettable parts of our visit was climbing Huayna Picchu, the towering peak that looms behind the ruins in iconic photos. The trail is steep and narrow, with sections that require you to hold onto handrails or scramble up large stone steps. However, the climb is exhilarating, and the reward is breathtaking. From the summit, you get a panoramic view of the entire citadel, the Urubamba River snaking through the valley far below, and the surrounding cloud forest. It's a perspective that makes you truly appreciate the strategic genius of the Inca, who built Machu Picchu in this remote and majestic location.

# The Wonder of Machu Picchu Cont.

The site itself is full of intriguing structures, including the Temple of the Sun, with its perfectly carved windows that align with the solstices, and the Intihuatana Stone, believed to have been used as a solar clock. The terraced slopes not only provided space for agriculture but also prevented landslides, a necessity in this steep, mountainous terrain. Every detail of Machu Picchu's construction reflects a deep respect for nature and a harmony with the land.

Walking through the ruins, it's easy to imagine what life might have been like here centuries ago. The ingenuity, resilience, and vision of the Inca people are present in every corner of this ancient city. Machu Picchu isn't just a historical site—it's a living testament to human creativity and the enduring connection between civilization and the natural world.







# Other Things to Do While You're Here

Immerse yourself in the unique blend of Andean and Spanish Catholic culture. In Cusco's Plaza de Armas, you'll find two iconic churches: the Cusco Cathedral and the Church of the Jesuits (Iglesia de la Compañía de Jesús). The cathedral, built on top of an Inca palace, showcases stunning religious art and architecture, including works by local artists who blended Catholic and Andean traditions. The Church of the Jesuits, with its ornate Baroque façade, is another architectural marvel that reflects the Spanish influence on Cusco's cultural landscape. We also embarked on an exhilarating ATV tour to the Salineras Salt Mines and Moray. The salt mines, with thousands of terraced pools carved into the mountainside, are still harvested by local families. Moray, on the other hand, is a masterpiece of Inca agricultural science, featuring circular terraces designed to test and optimize different growing conditions. For some post-adventure relaxation, consider visiting a spa.

Many local spas offer treatments inspired by Andean traditions, such as herbal baths and massages, perfect for easing sore muscles after hiking or sightseeing.

And that's just the beginning—there's so much more to explore in Cusco and the Sacred Valley, from vibrant markets and cultural festivals to additional ruins and breathtaking hikes. Each experience adds another layer to the wonder of this incredible region.



Day	Activity
Day 1 (Travel to Cusco)	Departed from hometown and traveled to Peru.
Day 2 (Cusco)	Arrived in Cusco in the afternoon. Checked in at the hotel and took it easy to adjust to the altitude.
Day 3 (Cusco)	Explored Cusco—walked around the Centro Histórico, shopped at markets, and enjoyed local cuisine.
Day 4 (Cusco)	Took an ATV tour to Moray and Salineras Salt Mines. Cost: \$60 for two people on two ATVs.
Day 5 (Travel to Aguas Calientes)	Left early for San Pedro Station and took the train to Aguas Calientes. Checked into hotel, had dinner, and relaxed.
Day 6 (Aguas Calientes)	Early morning hike to Machu Picchu, rising at 4:00 am, reaching the entrance by 6:00 am. Explored Circuit 3 and climbed Huayna Picchu.
Day 7 (Aguas Calientes)	Returned to Machu Picchu to explore a different circuit and gain a new perspective on the site.
Day 8 (Return to Cusco)	Returned to Cusco, relaxed, and prepared for the trip back home.
Day 9 (Travel Home)	Departed from Cusco and returned home, completing the adventure.



#### 1. Do I need a visa to visit Peru?

Most travelers can enter Peru without a visa for stays up to 90 days. However, it's best to check Peru's entry requirements based on your nationality. Your passport should be valid for at least 6 months after your planned departure date.

#### 2. How do I deal with high altitude in Cusco and Machu Picchu?

Altitude sickness is common due to elevations over 11,000 ft in Cusco. To help acclimate, stay hydrated, avoid alcohol, and take it easy for the first couple of days. Coca tea is a popular remedy. If symptoms persist, over-the-counter medication or oxygen support is available locally.

#### 3. What is the best time to visit Machu Picchu?

The best time to visit is during the dry season (May to September), when trails and viewpoints are more accessible. The rainy season (December to March) can cause slippery conditions and limited visibility, though fewer crowds are present during this time.

#### 4. What currency is used in Peru, and should I carry cash?

Peru uses the Peruvian Sol (PEN). While credit cards are widely accepted in cities, rural areas and markets often require cash. ATMs are available in major cities but may charge fees. Carry small bills for transportation, tips, and smaller vendors.

#### 5. What should I pack for this trip?

Pack layers for varying climates, comfortable hiking shoes, rain gear, a reusable water bottle, and sunscreen. A small first-aid kit and altitude medication can also be helpful. Avoid packing heavy since you'll be traveling between multiple locations.

#### 6. Can I drink the tap water in Peru?

No. Tap water is not safe to drink in Peru. Stick to bottled, filtered, or boiled water. Avoid ice in drinks and wash fresh produce thoroughly.

#### 7. How do I book tickets to Machu Picchu?

Tickets to Machu Picchu and additional hikes like Huayna Picchu should be booked in advance, especially during peak travel months. Availability can sell out months ahead. You can purchase tickets through the official Peruvian government website or a reliable tour operator.

#### 8. What transportation options are available in Peru?

Domestic flights are the fastest way to travel between Lima and Cusco. For local travel, buses, colectivos (shared vans), and taxis are common. For Machu Picchu, you can take a train from Ollantaytambo or a trek along the Inca Trail.

#### 9. Do I need to speak Spanish to get around?

English is spoken in major tourist areas, but in rural regions and with local vendors, basic Spanish will be very helpful. Learning phrases like "¿Dónde está el baño?" (Where is the bathroom?) and "¿Cuánto cuesta?" (How much does it cost?) can make your trip easier.

#### 10. What health precautions should I take?

Consider travel insurance, and be prepared to address altitude sickness. Be cautious with food and water safety to avoid traveler's diarrhea.

#### 11. What are some customs and etiquette tips I should know?

Peruvians are warm and friendly but value respect for their traditions and sacred sites. Always ask for permission before taking photos of people, and avoid touching or climbing on historical structures. A simple "gracias" (thank you) and a smile go a long way.



#### 12. How far in advance should I book my Machu Picchu tickets?

It's best to book your Machu Picchu entrance tickets several weeks to a few months in advance, especially if you plan to hike Huayna Picchu or Machu Picchu Mountain, as these sell out quickly during peak travel seasons (May to September). Tickets are circuit-specific, so plan your route and any additional hikes beforehand.

#### 13. How do I get train tickets to Machu Picchu?

You can book train tickets through PeruRail or IncaRail, departing from Cusco or Ollantaytambo. Trains to Aguas Calientes can sell out, especially during high season, so early booking is recommended. There are different classes, from budget to luxury, offering scenic rides through the Sacred Valley.

#### 14. What documents do I need to enter Machu Picchu?

You'll need your entrance ticket, passport, and train ticket. All three will be checked at the entrance to the site. Ensure your documents are printed or easily accessible.

#### 15. Are there luggage restrictions on trains to Machu Picchu?

Yes, most train services limit luggage to one small bag (about 5 kg / 11 lbs). It's best to pack light for your trip to Aguas Calientes. Many hotels in Cusco offer luggage storage services for larger bags.

#### 16. Can I change my circuit or hike after booking my ticket?

Unfortunately, tickets are non-changeable once booked. However, during our visit, we were able to negotiate an on-site "upgrade" for a different circuit by paying 100 PEN to an official. This may not always be an option, so plan carefully in advance.

#### 17. How do the Machu Picchu circuits work?

There are four circuits, each offering a different experience:

- Circuit 1 & 2: Longer routes with panoramic views.
- Circuit 3: Paired with Huayna Picchu, covering lower terraces and offering the most exciting trek in our experience.
- Circuit 4: Easier, lower-level access to the main plaza and Sacred Rock.

Each circuit limits where you can go, so choose the one that best fits your interests and fitness level.

#### 18. Can I walk to Machu Picchu, or should I take the bus?

You can either hike from Aguas Calientes (a steep 1.5-2 hour climb) or take the shuttle bus. Bus tickets can be purchased in Aguas Calientes, and buses run frequently, departing every 10-15 minutes. The hike offers a rewarding challenge, while the bus is a convenient alternative if you prefer to conserve energy.

