

Peru Travel Guide

Peru is without a doubt one of the most captivating countries in South America. Famously home of the epic lost Inca citadel of Machu Picchu and the mind-blowing Nazca Lines, this country's unique past awakens the adventurer in travellers of all sorts. Its awe-inspiring scenery varies from the wild Amazon jungles to vast coastal deserts and the icy peaks of the Andes. In it, Peru hosts a biodiversity rarely seen within the limits of a single country, with a list of spectacular wildlife far beyond the well-known llamas and circling condors. On top of all that, Peru's friendly, multi-ethnic people are a cultural treasure on their own. The enchanting mix of dozens of distinct indigenous groups and mestizos, all with their own colourful traditions and food delicacies, is an encounter you won't easily forget.

Know before your trip to Peru

Although Peru has rich natural resources and many great places to visit, the poverty scale reaches 25.8% of the population. The rich, consisting mostly of a Hispanic (or "Criollo") elite, live in the cities. Nevertheless, most Peruvians are great nationalists and love their country with pride (largely stemming from Peru's history as the hub of both the Inca empire and Spain's South American empire). Also, many Peruvians separate the state of Peru and its government in their minds. Many of them distrust their government and police, and people are used to fighting corruption and embezzlement scandals, as in many countries.

The Peruvian economy is healthy and quite strong, however inequality is still common. It is indebted and dependent on industrial nations, especially China, Russia and United States. The US foreign policy decisions in recent years has contributed to a widely held negative view about the US government in Peru, but not against individual citizens.

The word gringo is used commonly but is not generally intended as offensive. The original meaning encompassed all white people who do not speak Spanish. Many people use the word gringo exclusively for Americans or American look-alikes. It's not uncommon for blonde people to be called gringo. Peruvians do not hesitate to greet you with "¡Hola, gringo!".

Generally, people are very friendly, peaceful and helpful. When in trouble, you mostly can rely on getting help. But as with any setting, it is always good to watch out for yourself and try to avoid bad situations. If you get into an argument, it is a good idea to remain amicable, but firm. Most of the time, you can find a compromise that satisfies everyone.

Peru is not exactly a haven for efficiency. Do not expect things to be on time, or exactly as they intend to be. Outside of the more upscale tourist services and big cities like Lima, English is uncommon and the people, trying to be friendly, can give wrong or inexact advice, a translator can always be helpful in this cases. Plan ahead and leave plenty of time for travelling.

Electricity

Most of Peru uses 220V, 60Hz. Talara uses a mixture of 110V, 60Hz and 220V, 60Hz. Arequipa uses 220V, 50Hz. Most outlets are Type A and Type C, that is they will accept either plug, however sometimes they will either be Type A or C and will not accept the other style. It's uncommon to find grounded outlets (Type B) but you may come across them occasionally. It's not recommended to adapt a three pin plug for use in a two pin outlet.

Time Zone

Peru Time (PET) is 5 hours behind Coordinated Universal Time (UTC/GMT). There's no daylight saving time.

A Short History

Peru's oldest complex society called the Norte Chico civilization flourished in 3,000 BC. Early developments were followed by ancient cultures such as Cupisnique, Chavin, Paracas, Mochica, Nazca, Wari and Chimú. In the 15th century, the Incas emerged, becoming the largest civilized empire in Pre-Columbian America. The Spanish conquistadores conquered the Incan Empire in the 16th century, but while they wiped out the aristocracy, the peasantry, who spoke Quechua and Aymara, are very much alive today in Peru and neighboring Andean countries.

Getting to Peru in a nutshell

Ways to tour around in Peru

Times and Distances

Almost all of the cities outside Lima had a flight time between 1 hour and 1 hours and a half. It is recommended to use airlines. For example, from Lima to Zorritos in Tumbes (beautiful beach with modern resorts), the travel by bus is 21 hours.

- Yurimaguas-Iquitos(water): 2.5 days
- Quito-Lima(bus): 27 hours
- Lima-Cuzco(bus): 21 hours
- Lima-Cuzco(plane): 1.30 hour

In cities and around

Inside the cities, there is usually no problem getting around on city buses or taxis. Buses cost between 0.70 and 1.50 Soles (US\$0.20-0.40) inside a city, taxis between 7 and 8 soles (US\$2-2.60) in Lima, normally less in other cities. "Taxi" does not necessarily mean a car; the term also refers to bicycles, motor rickshaws, and motor bikes for hire. Taxis are divided between "formal" taxis, painted and marked as such and have a sticker with SOAT, and informal ones, that are just cars with a windshield sticker that says "Taxi". The last ones are better left to the locals, especially if you don't speak Spanish. Apart from the more upscale radio taxi (also the more expensive ones), the fare is not fixed or metered, but it is negotiated with the driver before getting into the vehicle. Ask at your hotel or hostel about the rate you may expect to pay to ride to a specific location to have a point of reference. There is no tipping at taxis.

"Micros" (from microbús), "combis" and "coasters". They have bus stops. The direction is shown by boards in the windscreen or painted on the side. If you want to take a bus, just give the driver a sign (raise your hand similar to hitch-hiking) to stop. If the bus is not completely overfilled (and sometimes when it is, too), it will stop to pick you up. During the ride, the ticket collector will ask you for the fee or, if there is not a ticket collector, you pay the driver when you get off (this is more common when taking longer trips where most people are going to the last stop, for example from Ollantaytambo to Urubamba). If you want to exit, you should press the button or just say loudly "¡Baja paradero!" (BAH-ho), and the driver will stop at the next paradero. They are cramped and dirty, and not helpful unless in small towns or during off peak hours. They also stop in the middle of the road, so be careful when getting down.

Please note: Micros are very common but known for being quite dangerous, and different government programs are trying to reduce the number of micros. It is advised to not take a micro.

By bus

Some main roads, especially along the coastal strip, are paved, but there are still a lot of dirt roads in very poor condition. In the rainy season, landslides may block even major roads.

Inter-city travel is mostly by bus, and some cities have train connections. In contrast to colectivos, buses, and of course trains, start from fixed points, either the central bus terminal or the court of the appropriate bus company. It is a good idea to buy your ticket one day in advance so that you can be relatively sure of finding a seat. If you come directly before the bus leaves, you risk finding that there are no more seats available. In most bus terminals you need to buy a separate departure tax of 1 or 1.5 soles.

If you are so unlucky as to be taller than 1.80m/5 ft 11 in, you will most likely be uncomfortable on the ride since the seats are much tighter than in Europe or some parts of North America. In this case, you can try to get the middle seat in the rear, but on dirt roads the rear swings heavily. In older buses, the seats in the first row are the best, but many buses have a driver cabin separated from the rest of the bus so that you look at a dark screen or a curtain rather than out the front windshield. In older buses, you can get one or two seats beside the driver, which gives you a good view of the passing landscape.

First-class express buses, complete with video, checked luggage and even meal service, travel between major cities, but remember to bring ear plugs as the video on these buses may be played extra-loud for the majority of the trip. You may need to present a passport to purchase a ticket.

Make sure that your luggage is rainproof since it is often transported on the roof of the bus when travelling in the Andes.

Avoid bus companies that allow travellers to get into the bus outside the official stations. They are normally badly managed and can be dangerous, due both to unsafe practices or to highway robberies, which are unfortunately not uncommon. This should be heeded especially by female travellers going on their own. There are many shoddy bus services in Peru, and it's best to go with one of the major companies such as Cruz del Sur, Oltursa or others. Get information at the hotel, hostel or tourist information booth before catching a ride. You can find more information **on the web** that compares diverse companies.

By train

Even when going by train, it's best to buy the ticket in advance. Buy 1st class or buffet class (still higher), or you risk getting completely covered by luggage. People will put their luggage under your seat, in front of your feet, beside you and everywhere where some little place is left. This makes the journey quite uncomfortable, since you can't move any more and the view of the landscape is bad.

There are five rail lines in Peru:

- Cuzco - Machu Picchu — For more information on [trains to Machu Picchu], go to PeruRail's web site.
- Cuzco - Juliaca - Puno.
- Arequipa - Juliaca — Service has been suspended as of early 2007.
- Lima - Huancayo — The Ferrocarril Central Andino the line joining Lima to Huancayo is the second highest railway in the world and the Highest in South America. The Journey on board of the Train of the Andes, through the heart of Peru is simply breathtaking. It is an 11 hour experience where the train reaches an altitude of 4781m.a.s.l (15,681 ft) and goes through 69 tunnels, 58 bridges and makes 6 zigzags. In 1999, the company was privatized, in 2005, Ferrocarril Central Andino renovated their passenger wagons in a Luxurious and comfortable way which puts the railway in the list of the most famous trains along with the Orient Express and the Transsiberien. Unfortunately the service is irregular. You can check in the **web site**.
- Huancayo - Huancavelica.

By foot

Beside the famous Inca trail to Machu Picchu, you can do a lot of more hikes all along the Sierra, preferably in the dry season. The hiker's Mecca is Huaraz, where you can find a lot of agencies that offer guided tours and/or equipment to borrow. The thin vegetation in the higher Sierra makes off-trail hiking easy. Good maps are hard to find inside Peru. It is better to bring them from home. Make sure you have enough iodine to purify your drinking water. When hiking in higher altitude, good acclimatisation is absolutely necessary. Take a good sleeping bag with you, since nights in the Sierra may become bitterly cold (-10°C in 4,500 m altitude are normal, sometimes still colder). Beware of thunderstorms that may rise up very suddenly. Rapid falling temperature and hard rain falls are a serious danger in higher altitudes. Don't forget that the night lasts for 12

hours year-round, so a flashlight is a good idea. When hiking on higher, but not snow covered mountains, water may be rare. Getting alcohol for stoves is easy: Either buy the blue colored alcohol de quemar or, better, simply buy pure drinking alcohol. You can get this in every town for about 3 Soles (US\$0.85) per liter. (Don't even think about drinking it). It won't be so easy to find special fuel for gasoline stoves. Gasoline for cars can also be found in many hardware stores (ferreterías) sold by liters, but you can actually buy it directly on gas stations, provided you bring your own bottle.

By car

It is also possible to tour the interior of the country by car. This gives you a chance to get "off the beaten track" and explore some of the areas that haven't been transformed by tourism. An international driver's license is needed for driving in Peru.

Peru has three main roads which run from north to south: the fully paved Panamericana Sur/Norte (PE-1S/1N) which passes through the whole country; more to the east there are the partially paved Longitudinal de la Sierra Sur/Norte (PE-3S/3N), Interoceánica Sur (PE-26) as well as the Interoceánica Norte (PE-5N). Most parts of these roads are toll roads in the direction from north to south. The main roads are connected by 20 streets from west to east.

Beware that, aside from a few major roads which are in good condition, most roads are unpaved and your speed on them will be severely restricted. For these roads a 4WD is necessary. This is especially true during the rainy season from November to April. You should travel very well informed about your route. Take a good road map with you (e.g. Waterproof Peru Map by ITMB). On the web, cochera andina provides useful information about road conditions, travel times and distances for more than 130 routes in Peru.

Be sure to bring plenty of gas, as gas stations in unpopulated areas are very rare and will oftentimes be closed. Purchasing gas late at night can be an adventure all its own, as even in more populated areas gas stations tend to close early and the pumps are locked. The owner of the station sometimes sleeps inside and, if you can rouse him, he will come out and let you fill up. Be aware of the higher gasoline consumption in the mountains which often increases to more than 20 l/100 km (12 MPG) (5 gal/62 mi).

The traffic regulations are almost the same as in Europe and the U.S. But locals tend to interpret them freely. You better honk in unclear situations, e.g. in curves and at crossings to indicate the right of way. Also note that traffic checkpoints tend to be scattered throughout the country and the police may try to extract bribes from foreigners for passage. It would be wise to travel with a native speaker who can navigate the roads and deal with law enforcement.

Touting

Like in most countries, also in Peru there is a vast crowd of touts hanging around the airports and bus stations or bus terminals. It is any travellers' wise decision not to do business with the people that are trying to sell you their stuff on the street/bus station/airport. First of all, if they would have a decent place, they wouldn't have to sell it to non suspecting tourists trying to drag them off from wherever they can find them. More important, it really is not a good idea to hand out money to the first person you meet upon arriving somewhere.

TIP: When you arrive in any town, be sure to have already decided what hotel you will be going to. Don't mention this or any other information to the touts awaiting you. They will use whatever you tell them to construe lies to make you change your mind and go with them. If you've already picked a reasonable hotel chances are that you will be OK there and they will have any (extra) information you'd be looking for, like bookings for tours or tickets.

The fancy language of Peru

Like most of South America, the official language of Peru is **Spanish**. It's worth getting familiar with some basic Spanish words, as you'll need them to make your way around outside the main tourist centres. Although English is spoken by an increasing number of young people in Lima and to a limited extent in the most popular tourist spots, you'll find English far less commonly understood than you might expect in a country where tourism is such a big industry.

Especially when you're making your own way around, learning some Quechua or Aymara may open doors, as indigenous people will highly appreciate your effort. Quecha is the language of the Incas and the first language for many indigenous in the countryside of the Sierra. Aymara was the language of the Tihuanacu culture and it's widely spoken on the Altiplano. In both cases however, people will generally speak English too.

Amazing attractions awaits you in Peru

Forgotten temples in dense Amazon jungles, lost Inca cities, fabulous wildlife and extra-ordinary folklore. Peru holds all the stuff adventure movies are made of.

Many of the best Inca sites are in the **Inca Highlands**, around the beautiful city of **Cuzco**, once the capital of the Inca Empire and now a World Heritage Site itself, as well as a bustling city. Book at least half a year in advance if you want to walk the famous 4-day hike **Inca Trail**, which commonly starts at the 15th century Inca dwellings of **Ollantaytambo**. Your imagination must be on its A-game to see past the large crowds at the end destination, **Machu Picchu**, but it's worth your trouble. Wait for the biggest crowds to leave, find a quiet spot away from the tourist hassle and contemplate your view of one of the most famous and spectacular archaeological sites in the world. Many other sites are in the neighboring **Sacred Valley**.

The list of great Peruvian ruins from Pre-Columbian times is long, and not all of them are of Inca origin. A World Heritage Site, the ancient adobe capital **Chan Chan**, built by the Chimú culture, was conquered in the 15th century. Other popular sites are the tombs of **Sipán**, the ruined fortress of **Kuelap**, the pre-Incan burial grounds of **Sillustani**, and Caral, the most ancient city in the Americas. Particularly well-known are the spectacular **Nazca lines**, which you should see from the air, even if it'll take some haggling to get your ticket for the right price.

Natural attractions

Home to 84 out of the 104 recognized ecological zones in the world, Peru is incredibly rich in **biological diversity**. Benefiting from a broad array of landscapes and ecosystems, this country is a Valhalla for anyone who loves **wildlife**. It's condors, llama's and jaguars that Peru is famous for, but almost a third of the bird species in the world and no less than 4000 butterflies live here too.



One of the best places to see all of this natural beauty is **Manú National Park**. This World Heritage Site boasts over 15000 plant species, a 1000 different birds and some 220 mammals, including pumas, Giant anteaters and many monkeys. Disputably called the "world's deepest canyon", the stunning **Colca Canyon** is Peru's third most-visited destination, just a stones-throw out of the beautiful city of **Arequipa**. Get close to the celebrated **Andean Condors** as they fly along the high canyon walls or buy a colourful handmade souvenir from one of the indigenous people that populate the picturesque Colca Valley. Of all the peaks in the Peruvian Andes, the 6768m Huascarán in **Huascarán National Park** is the highest of all. This 3000 km² World Heritage Site holds 663 glaciers, 296 lakes and 41 tributaries of three major rivers. The large city of **Iquitos** is a popular starting point to discover the mystic **Amazon River**, one of the seven natural wonders of the world. It's also the capital city of the Charapa culture. Just a few other great picks out of the long list of protected areas in Peru are **Pacaya-Samiria** National Reserve, **Rio Abiseo** National Park and **Cutervo** National Park (with many caves).

Folklore

The diversity of **Peru's people** and cultures is reflected in a rich tradition of festivals, dance and music. In the Andes, the plaintive wail of the flute and beat of the drum accompany songs depicting indigenous life while dancers masked as devils and spirits are a marriage of pagan and Christian beliefs. In the jungle, ceremonial music and dance are a window into tribal life. And along the coast, a blend of elegant Spanish sounds and vibrant African rhythms reflect the Conquest and later slave labor of the New World. One of the shows you can not miss it is the Caballo de Paso Peruano in Lima and the north coast of Peru. The Concurso del Caballo de Paso Peruano is in april and it is a mix between the caballos and the dance called "marinera" which is the coastal cultural expression in Peru.

Other highlights

Make your way to the blue waters of **Lake Titicaca** for an enchanting, high altitude encounter with local peasant women wearing bowler hats and join in the celebrations of their ancient communities. **Puno** is a good place to start, also for a laid-back boat ride to the various islands and Altiplano towns on and around the lake, all with their own character and historic remains. If you're craving perfect beaches and a sunburn, head to the crowded sands and resorts of **Piura/Tumbes**. Spend a day in one of the many excellent museums in **Lima** and dance until the morning in one of the cities popular clubs. Buy shamanistic herbs at the market of **Chiclayo** and see the dozens of tombs around it.

Relaxing things to do in Peru

Trekking is a great way to see the country. The most widely known route is the classic Inca Trail to Machu Picchu. Other popular routes include Cordillera Blanca - Huaraz, Colca Canyon - Arequipa, Ausangate Trek, Salkantay trek (also spelt Salkcantay), Choquequirao trek and Inka Jungle trek to Machu Picchu - an adrenaline trip to Machu Picchu.

Trek prices can vary considerably between companies, as can their respective porters' working conditions (no pack animals are allowed, hence equipment is carried by human porters). Although there is a minimum porter wage (PEN42/day, about USD15) and maximum load porters can carry (25kg/55 lb), not all companies keep to their claims!

Peru offers a big variety of adrenaline sport such as rafting, kayaking, biking, zip line, horseback riding, surfing, ATV, motocross, paragliding, canopy, canoing, sandboarding, etc.

Another popular activity to do in Peru is to visit its wildlife in the Amazon Rainforest that can be also considered as an adrenaline sport thanks to spending time among wild animals.

Tips before purchasing stuff in Peru

The currency of Peru is the sol (**PEN**), symbolised as S/.

As of 20 October 2015, USD1 = PEN3.25 and €1 = PEN3.69 and it has been one of the more stable currencies in South America over the last few years.

Coins are available in five, two and one sol, and in 50, 20, 10, 5 and 1 centimo. 5 and 1 centimo coins are not normally accepted outside of big supermarkets or banks, so avoid them (or bring them home for a collection or to give to friends). Notes are available in 10, 20, 50, 100 and 200 soles denominations; 200 soles notes are uncommon and - just like large bills in other countries - will not be accepted in many places.

ATMs are available in big cities, upmarket hotels, and touristic areas. With a Cirrus or Maestro sign on it, you can withdraw cash easily. The exchange rate is the same as credit cards but fees are much lower. Some banks charge a fee for getting cash from their ATM's, with BBVA Banco Continental reportedly charging excessive fees without telling you in advance. Make sure to carry sufficient cash when visiting smaller towns, as your credit card or traveler checks might not be accepted there.

Credit cards and travelers checks are common. Although cash has a ca. 2% better change rate, you are strongly advised not to carry large amounts of cash on your journey. The Banco de Credito (BCP) gives good rates on traveler checks. Rates in change offices are often somewhat worse. It's always worth comparing them before changing your money. When changing your money in change offices, check their calculations. Most of them make calculations on the fly for the amount you want using an electronic calculator in plain view, even showing you the process step by step (unless they are brutally obvious, like changing tens or hundreds). If they don't show, keep the money in your pocket and find someone that does.

Always keep in mind that **counterfeiting** is a big problem in Peru: make sure to get familiar with the money and do not hesitate to reject any note or coin (especially the 5 sol coins) that look suspicious, just like any Peruvian would do. In other words, if you want to look like a savvy foreigner, take 10 seconds to check any paper note you get, even at a bank. All bills have a watermark and security stripe, and the large number on the extreme right denoting the denomination of the bill will change from purple to green when viewed at an angle. Don't take any note that is ripped; you won't be able to use it anywhere else but a bank.

If you are stuck with a counterfeit coin or note, if you try to use it at big stores they may want to confiscate it. Don't accept damaged/ripped bills, since you will have to take them to a bank in order to change them into new ones before you can spend them. Be especially careful when exchanging money with money-changers on the street (a common way for counterfeit money to enter the money supply) or at the border (notably the one with Ecuador).

Typically, small bills are very helpful to carry around. Change large bills into small ones as often as possible. If you only have 50 and 100 Soles notes on you, consider changing them at a bank. Local merchants and taxistas often claim to not have any change on them, forcing you to wait in public while they search for some (potentially dangerous) and sometimes with the hope that you'll grow impatient and let them keep the change.

In Peru, it's not as common for US\$ to be accepted in transactions as in other countries (such as Ecuador), but some nice, new 10 or 20 US dollar bills can be helpful in some situations. Often in small towns, local shops will change money for you. If so, it will be clearly marked.

Costs

If you're on a budget, you can get around well for USD50 a day. Basic hotels or hostels (hospedajes) are available everywhere, with dorm beds in youth hostels typically costing USD8-15. You'll find plenty of very cheap restaurants (USD0.50-1.50) but for slightly more (USD2 -3) you'll get an often much better lunch or dinner at better restaurants. Fancy restaurants are available in every city, with menus starting from US\$20.

Buses are a fairly cheap way to get around. A 10 hour bus ride in a normal bus (not "Royal Class" or something like that) will set you back about US\$20. If you can afford it, the more luxurious seats go for about double the price but will make a great difference in terms of comfort. Avoid bus companies that allow travellers to get into the bus outside the official stations. They are often badly managed and can be dangerous, due both to unsafe practices or to highway robberies, which are unfortunately not uncommon. This should be heeded especially by female travellers on their own. Your hotel, hostel or a local tourist information booth can point you to the better options.

Trains (except the ones for Machu Picchu, which are relatively expensive) run for similar fees.

Don't forget to retain your exit fee of USD30.25 They do accept USD or Soles for the fee and be sure to pay the exit fee before you get in line for security checks or you'll get to wait again.

Handicrafts

Peru is famous for a lot of different, really nice and relatively cheap handicrafts. Keep in mind that buying handicrafts support traditional skills and helps many families to gain their modest income. Look for:

- Pullovers, and a lot of other (alpaca-)woolen products in all the Sierra. Puno is maybe the cheapest place.
- Wall carpets (tejidos).
- Carvings on stone, wood and dried pumpkins.
- Silver and gold jewellery.
- typical music instruments like pan flutes (zampoñas), skin drums.
- many other

Do not accept any handicrafts that look like (or actually are) pre-columbian pottery or jewelry. It is illegal to trade them and there is the possibility not only of them being confiscated, but of being prosecuted for illegal trading, even if the actual artifacts are copies or fakes. Dealing with the police from the criminal side is messy and really unpleasant.

Buyer beware: Watch out for fake (Bamba) Alpaca wool products many items sold to the unsuspecting gringo are actually synthetic or ordinary wool! That nice soft jumper in the market for USD8 or so is most certain to be acrylic. Even in places such as Puno there is no easy way to tell if it is made from Alpaca, sometimes it might have a small percentage of Alpaca mixed in with other fibres. Baby Alpaca is not from baby animals but the first shearing and the fibre is very soft and fine. Generally Alpaca fibre has a low lustre and a slightly greasy hand to it and is slow to recover from being stretched. Shop and compare.

Bargaining

Bargaining is very common. If you are not used to it, respect some rules. If you intend to buy something, first ask the price, even if you already know what it actually should cost. Then check whether everything is all right. (Does the pullover fit you? Do you really want to buy it? Is the expiration date on the cheese exceeded? etc.) If the price is OK, pay it. If not, it's your turn to say a lower price, but stay realistic. First get an idea about how much you would expect to pay. Then say a price about 20-30% lower. It's always good if you can give some reason for that. **Once you have said a price, you cannot give a lower one later.** This would be regarded as a very impolite behavior. If you feel that

you can't get your price, just say "No, gracias." and begin to walk away. This is your last chance. If you are lucky, the seller will give you a last offer, if not, say "No, gracias." again and go on walking. Realize that most of the products in touristy markets (i.e. the market in Pisac) **will be sold** in nearly every other market throughout your travels in Peru and South America, so try not to worry about never again finding that particular alpaca scarf.

You have a way for bargaining without saying an exact price, and it's saying "¿Nada menos?", then you will be asking just if they can lower a bit the price.

Keep in mind: Never begin to bargain if you don't really want to buy.

Coca

DO NOT BRING COCA PRODUCTS HOME.

Coca leaves and derived products (unless decocainized) are **illegal** in the vast majority of countries, under the 1961 Single Convention on Narcotic Drugs. Even just bringing home a box of coca tea may subject you to very severe drug trafficking laws. Also, while coca is legal in Peru, buying or selling cocaine is illegal.

Decocainized coca products are not generally available in Peru, and vendors may assure you that processed coca products (like tea) are fine to bring home, but this is wrong. It is legal to purchase and consume coca products in Peru (other than cocaine), and it is likely legal to purchase decocainized coca products (like Coca-Cola, or decocainized coca tea) in your home country, but importing coca products is illegal.

Instead of coca tea, consider emoliente, a traditional herbal tea of coastal regions, widely available in Lima.

While in Peru, in addition to coca tea and coca leaves, you may also find coca candies, coca beer, etc. The Museo de la Coca in Cuzco sells a wide variety of coca products.

General Notes

Supermarkets can only be found in cities and are somewhat expensive. In every town, there is at least one market place or hall, except Lima that has a dense concentration of supermarkets, malls and department stores. In cities, there are different markets (or sections of one big market) for different articles.

Stores with similar articles tend to be grouped in the same street. So, if you once know the appropriate street when looking for something special, it shouldn't be no more problem to find it quite soon.

Giving tips in restaurants (at least when basic or middle-range) is not very common but 10% for good service is polite. In the cities, you will always find some beggars, either sitting on the streets, or doing a musical number on the buses. Many of them really need help, especially the elderly and handicapped. Usual donations are about PEN0.10-0.20 (USD0.03-0.06). This is not much, but some unskilled workers don't get much more than PEN10 for a hard working day. Whether you want to give money to child beggars or not is your decision. But consider that doing so may make it more attractive for parents to send their children begging in the street instead of sending them to school. Buy them food instead, they do need it.

Delectable meals to eat in Peru



Peruvian cuisine is among the most varied in the world. Not only does the country grow a variety of fruits and vegetables, but it does so throughout the year. Peruvian geography offers at least 8 different climates (desert along the coast, steep and high mountains, the Amazon basin). In Lima, due to its history as an important Spanish colonial port, the dishes are a mixture of amerindian, Spaniard, African, Asian and even Italian influences that contribute to the ever changing platos criollos (creole dishes). Rice is the staple foodstuff, and expect many dishes to include rice, in the Siera it's corn and potatoes, and in the Jungle yuca. Meat is traditionally included in most Peruvian dishes. Chicken (pollo), pork, sheep and beef are common. Alpacas are actually kept for wool, not for meat. Mostly, you will find that alpaca meat is rather tough. An Andean delicacy is guinea pig (cuy). Peruvian cuisine includes dishes which use various organs, including anticuchos, a kebab made from very marinated and spicy beef heart, and cau-cau (sounds like cow-cow), made from cow stomach served in a yellow sauce with potatoes. Anticuchos are a standard street stall food, but be careful with it.

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Throughout Peru there is a wide variety of potato dishes (papas as in Spain), the traditional Andean vegetable. Papa a la Huancaína is a tasty dish of potato slices and diced boiled egg topped with a thin, creamy yellow sauce, and usually includes a lettuce leaf and an olive or two. (A similar green sauce, called Ocopa, can be served over potatoes or yuca.) Papa rellena is mashed potato reformed into a potato-like shape, but with meat, vegetables, and other spicy filling in the middle. Aji de gallina is shredded chicken in a thick, spicy, cheese-based sauce over sliced potatoes, often with an olive and slice of hard-boiled egg. Causa is mashed potato layered with mayonnaise-based tuna or chicken salad mixed with hot peppers.

Many Peruvian dishes can contain strong condiments and be heavy, so if you have a weak stomach, proceed with caution.

Nowadays, the transport routes from the flat jungle areas are good enough to supply all the country with vegetables and fruits. Nevertheless, vegetables still have the status of a garnish for the meat. Vegetarian restaurants exist in all cities, but are relatively rare. In most areas, there is a rich offering of tropical fruits and fresh squeezed juices.

The natives typically eat in small restaurants or Chinese eateries ("chifas"); a menu there costs 5-8 Soles and includes a soup, a choice of main dish, and a drink.

Peruvians are quite proud of their desserts, especially in Lima. Try them with care, since they tend to be extremely sweet and loaded with sugars, eggs yolks and similar ingredients. Try mazamorra morada, or purple custard, made from the same purple corn used for chicha morada drink; together with arroz con leche (rice with sweetened condensed milk) is called a combinado (combination). Picarones are a sort of donut, made from fried yams dough and served with chancaca, a very sweet sugarcane syrup. And the sweetest dessert suspiro a la limeña is perfect if you are in sore need of a high-calorie glucose shock.

Toast! What to drink in Peru

The Pisco-Nazca area is famous for wine cultivating. Their more expensive vintages compare favorably against Chilean imports. Beer is nice, stronger than American brands but less full bodied than European ones. Most of Peruvian beers are made by Backus, currently owned by SAB Miller.

When drinking at bars and/or restaurants, be aware that Peruvian "Happy Hour" is a little different than in most countries. Prices for drinks will usually be posted on the walls and be a little cheaper than normal. The real difference is that you will be served 2 drinks, instead of one, for the listed price -- giving a new meaning to the term "half price." This can be a great way to save money (if you are traveling with a group) or to meet locals (if you are traveling alone). It can also lead you to get completely falling-down-drunk by accident, so be careful.

- **Caliente** is a hot alcoholic drink served during celebrations in Andean towns such as Tarma. It's basically a herbal tea with white rum for that added kick.
- **Chicha de Jora**, A cheap traditional alcoholic drink made from corn that is fermented and rather high in alcohol content for a non-distilled beverage. Not normally available at formal restaurants and quite uncommon in Lima outside of residential areas. Places that sell chicha have a long stick with a brightly-colored plastic bag on it propped up outside their door.
- **Chicha morada**, not to be confused with the previous one, is a soft drink made from boiled purple corn, with sugar and spices added (not a soda). Quite refreshing, it is widely available and very recommendable. Normally Peruvian cuisine restaurants will have their freshly made supply as part of the menu; it is also available from street vendors or diners, but take care with the water. Bottled or canned chicha morada is made from concentrates and not as pleasant as freshly-boiled chicha.
- **Coca Tea** or Mate de Coca, a tea made from the leaves of the coca plant. It is legal to drink this tea in Peru. It is great for adjusting to the altitude or after a heavy meal. It may be found cold but normally is served hot.
- You can find many places that serve fresh fruit drinks. Peru has a wide variety of fruits since its natural variety, so if you get a good "jugueria" you will have lots of options to choose from.
- The Peruvian amazon cities offer some typical drinks too as: **masato**, **chuchuhuasi**, **hidromiel** and others.
- **Coffee**. Peru is the world's largest producer of organic coffee. Ask for 'cafe pasado', the essence produced by pouring boiling hot water over fresh ground coffee from places like Chanchamayo.
- All of Peru's wines are inexpensive. Tacama, Ocucaje and Santiago Queirolo branded wines are the most reliable.
- **Emoliente**. Another popular drink in Peru, often sold in the streets by vendors for 50 centimos. Served hot, its flavor is best described as a thick, viscous tea, but surprisingly refreshing - depending on what herb and fruit extracts you choose to put into it, of course. Normally the vendor's mix will be good enough if you choose not to say anything, but you're free to select the mix yourself. Normally sold hot, is the usual after-party drink, as a "reconstituyente", but it can be drunk cold too.
- **Inca Kola**. The Peruvian equivalent of Coca Cola in the rest of the world, which was recently purchased by Coca Cola yet retains its unique taste. It is bright yellow and has its own unique flavor. It tastes like Hierba Luisa.



- **Pisco Sour.** An alcoholic drink with an interesting ingredients list, such as egg whites, that is the main drink in Peru and is available in most places. It is made from Pisco, a Peruvian kind of brandy that is worth a try; it is a strong drink as pisco is over 40° (around 70-80 proof) spirit, and the sweet taste can be deceiving. Since Chile registered the brand Chilean Pisco for commercial purposes in some countries, Peruvian producers decided to defend the denomination of origin (Pisco is a very old city in Peru) by being very strict about the quality standards. Be sure that you will find a very high quality product in any brand of Pisco made in Peru.

Beer

Some large towns have their own brand of beer which is hard to get elsewhere in the country. Cusqueña is one of the most popular beers while

Cristal is known as the beer of Peru, both can be found nation wide.

- Arequipeña
- Brahma
- Cristal
- Cusqueña
- Franca
- Pilsen Callao
- Pilsen Trujillo

What to learn in Peru

Peruvian Spanish, particularly in the coast, is much clearer than European Spanish and Spanish from other Latin American countries, especially México, Colombia and Chile. People don't tend to speak too fast, although in some areas, people speak considerably faster than in other areas, and they also use slang quite liberally. On the whole, Peru is a good and cheap place to embark on Spanish courses (once you are there).

Some slang terms:

chévere, bacán, cool.

chela (Cerveza), a beer.

Me da cólera, Me llega, it pisses me off.

Ya, right, sure (sometimes "ok" or "yup").

Loco, crazy person. Usually said in a friendly manner, also means "mate, friend, buddie".

Tombo means "policeman" (and policemen don't like hearing it).

Chibolo(a), a kid.

Bamba/pirata fake, counterfeit goods & products.

Money is often referred to as **plata** (as in silver). Mucha plata = too much money ("that's expensive!").

Some slang terms come from Quechua:

Que piña: means 'what bad luck' even though 'piña' in Quechua means 'coraje' or in English 'infuriating'.

Tengo una yaya: means 'I'm injured'. In Quechua, 'yaya' means injury. And 'yawar' means blood.

Arranca arranca no mas: means 'get the hell out'.

Where to sleep in Peru

Hotels in Peru are very common and fairly cheap. They range from 1 - 5 stars. 5 star hotels are normally for package tourism or business travel, and very common outside of Lima for most visited touristic attractions such as Cuzco/Machu Picchu with amazing landscapes, Paracas (to flight over the Nazca Lines), Tumbes with great beach resorts, and of course in Lima with international and peruvian companies. All of them under international standards and expensive, but really worthwhile to try them. 4 star hotels are usually a bit on the expensive side (>US\$80 per night) and common in the large cities. 3 star hotels are a good compromise between price and quality and usually US\$30-50. 2 and 1 star hotels are very cheap.

In many cities there are hotels in residential areas, but they are not tourist hotels but "couples" rooms for lovers. They are usually signed as "Hostel", which can confuse the unaware traveller thinking it was for backpackers. Lately there have being a huge development of guesthouses, backpackers lodging, bed and breakfast, and also vacation rentals (apartments for short term rent). So, the offer for lodging now is more varied.

Ways of staying safe in Peru

In Lima ring 105. In Lima and some of the larger cities there is a sort of local police called "Serenazgo": you may ask for help but they have no tourist oriented services.

- Be aware of your surroundings and try to avoid unlit or unpopulated areas, especially at night. There is a lot of petty crime that can turn violent. Avoid groups of male youngsters since there are many small gangs trying to rob passers-by. If you witness a robbery be very careful before intervening, since robbers may be armed and are quite prone to shooting if they feel threatened.
- Armed robberies of tourists are fairly common.
- A dirty old backpack with valuable contents is safer than a new one with old clothes in it. It's often good not to look too rich.
- Some travelers don't use wallets, but keep the bills and coins directly in their pocket. Let's say some little bills on the left side and the rest on the right side. Thus, the pickpocket's job gets much harder.
- Don't walk around with debit or credit cards in your pocket. Leave them in a safe place when you do not immediately need them, because tourists have been kidnapped and forced to take out money each day for a period of a few days.
- If you want to take large amounts of cash out with you, a neck wallet is always a good idea - you can hide it under your shirt.
- Watch out for false bills. Every bank has posters that explain what to check for when getting higher valued bills. The only security element that has not been falsified is the bichrome 10,20,50,100 or 200 now also used on US\$ bills. Don't be shy about checking any bills you receive. Most Peruvians do so, too. You may get false bills even at upscale places or (quite unusually, but it's been known to happen) banks, so check there too.
- Small quantities of drugs for personal use or possession (up to 2 g for powdered cocaine or 8 g for marijuana) are permitted by law (Section 299 of the Penal Code of Peru) PROVIDED THAT the user is in possession of only ONE type of drug. However, though possession in these amounts is legal, buying or selling these drugs is illegal.
- When taking a taxi, take a quick look in the back seat and in the trunk, to make sure there is nobody hiding there. There have been reports of armed robberies/kidnappings taking place in taxis. Afterwards, tourists are blindfolded and driven outside the city and left behind by the highway.
- At the border crossing from Ecuador (Huaquillas) to Peru people have tried to steal passports by acting like plain-clothed police officers. They give you another form to fill in which is fake. This has taken place although police and customs personnel have been next to them.
- When traveling on buses, it is recommended to keep your backpack under your seat with the strap hooked around your leg.

Police

- Tourist police are dressed in white shirts, instead of the usual green ones, and normally speak English and are quite helpful to tourists. The common police officer does not speak any other language but Spanish but normally will try to help.

Dealing with the police can take a lot of time. In order to get a copy of a police report you need to go to a Banco de la Nación and pay 3 soles. Without this the police won't give you a copy, and you can only arrange this during working days.

Natural disasters

Located on the Pacific Ring of Fire, earthquakes may occur in Peru. If you're near the coast when the ground starts shaking, beware of tsunamis.

Ways of staying healthy in Peru

Vaccinations and Prophylaxis

The quantity and **type of vaccines** necessary to travel to Peru depend on several factors, including your medical history and which parts of the country you plan to visit. The vaccines most commonly needed to travel to Peru are against tetanus, diphtheria, typhoid fever, hepatitis A and B, yellow fever, rabies and meningitis. Some of these require more than one dose or significant waiting time before they become effective. Therefore, you should inquire about necessary vaccines 6 to 8 weeks before your trip.

Hepatitis A and Typhoid fever vaccinations are recommended for all travellers.

The government of Peru recommends Yellow fever vaccine for all travellers who are going to visit forest areas (Amazonia) below 2,300m (7,546 ft). Travellers that only visit coast or highlands do not need the vaccine for yellow fever.

The vaccine for yellow fever is also required for all travellers who arrive from countries in Africa and the Americas where the disease is endemic.

In recent years, yellow fever has been reported in Cuzco, San Martín, Loreto, Pasco, Amazonas, Ancash, Ayacucho, Huánuco, Junín, Madre de Dios, Puno and Ucayali.

Vaccination Center Perú Hepatitis B vaccine is recommended for travelers who believe they might have sex in the country, especially if the visit is for more than 6 months.

The rabies vaccine is recommended for travelers who could have close contact with infected animals while not in range of a hospital, but if you are bitten, get medical help as soon as possible in any case, as the prophylactic rabies vaccine is not sufficient to prevent a rabies infection, which is almost always fatal once symptoms start.

Two doses of the measles/mumps/rubella (MMR) are recommended for all travellers who have not received this vaccine before.

A tetanus/diphtheria booster is recommended every 10 years.

For more information, see our article on infectious diseases and consult a doctor.

Take a first aid kit, especially if you plan to hike in the countryside during your visit.

Malaria is present in parts of Peru. There is no risk of malaria in the big cities like Lima and surrounding areas or in areas above the 1500 m (4,921 ft). However, you could be at risk: (1) on the coast north of the country (Tumbes, Piura, Lambayeque); (2) in the Amazon region: Loreto department (Iquitos), San Martín, Ucayali, just as Amazon (chachapoyas), Cajamarca (Jaen). There have also been reported cases of malaria in Cuzco Department (Province of Concepción away from the tourist area of Machu Picchu) and Madre de Dios. Take appropriate precautions — and if advised by a physician, prophylactic medications — if you plan to visit these areas.

Food safety - Enjoy the food, but be judicious, lest you contract diarrhea, dysentery, or a more serious disease such as a parasitic infestation that could ruin your trip. Thoroughly cooked food is most likely to be safe. Food that's been left out too long or landed on by flies could make you sick. Seafood can go bad particularly easily. Raw fruits and vegetables can be dangerous unless you can safely peel them without touching the pulp inside, or at least wash them in safe (not unboiled tap) water. Bananas and papayas are the safest fruits.

Tap water - Tap water is unsafe to drink or use for brushing your teeth in Peru, unless you boil it. Bottled water is cheap and tastes better than boiled water. Check the bottle to make sure that it has not been opened and refilled. In restaurants, (if you don't trust them) you could ask for the bottle of water to be opened in your presence. Ice cubes are ideally made with purified water, however avoid ice if in doubt.

Insect bites - Avoiding insect bites reduces the risk of contracting diseases transmitted by mosquitoes such as yellow fever, dengue fever, leishmaniasis and malaria. Consider wearing long sleeves and read [Pests#Mosquitoes](#) for other useful advice.

Rabies - There have been reported cases of rabies in Peru, so beware of animals that behave strangely around you and get treatment immediately if you are bitten.

Heat and sun - Do not expect to become quickly acclimated to the heat, especially in the jungle. Avoid exhaustion, heat stroke and sunburn by taking sensible precautions, including drinking plenty of safe water and not waiting to feel thirsty before taking a sip.

Accidents and injuries - Accidents and injuries produce more deaths of travellers than diseases, so be alert. Aside from normal precautions, you might want to avoid riding a bicycle or motorcycle in Peru if you are not very advanced.

Pharmacies

Common medicines, like antibiotics, can be bought in pharmacies (farmacias or boticas) quite cheaply and without restrictions. However, make sure the expiration date has not been reached. Pharmacists are mostly very helpful and can be consulted if needed. For less serious illnesses, they may replace a doctor.

Diarrhea

Electrolytic drinks help guard against dehydration. You can get powders to dissolve in water in almost every pharmacy. If not, just dissolve sugar and salt in water. But don't forget to use safe water, not unsafe tap water! Bacterial diarrhea can be treated with antibiotics, if it doesn't vanish during a week. Usually, pharmacies are quite helpful.

Altitude

If you do not have experience with higher altitudes above 3,500m (12,000 ft), don't underestimate it! It is not unusual for unacclimatized tourists to faint. If you are coming from sea level, stay at a medium height of about 3,000 m (10,000 ft) for at least one week. Then, altitudes of around 4,500 m (15,000 ft) should not be a risk, although you still will strongly feel the height. See also: [Altitude sickness](#)

Sunburn

Since Peru is close to the equator, the sun can become dangerous for your skin and eyes. Especially in the Sierra, the strong UV radiation due to the height in combination with the rather cold air may burn your skin before you notice it. Sun-blockers are easy to get in drug stores (boticas). If your eyes are sensitive to light, bring good UV-blocking sunglasses from home. Of course, you can buy sunglasses in Peru, too, but you should really be sure that they block the whole UV spectrum; otherwise, they might be worse than none.

Sanitary facilities

Outside of obviously well-set up restaurants and hotels in cities and towns, **toilets** are often quite primitive and sometimes really dirty. It's a good idea to bring your own paper with you, as Peruvian toilet paper may be too rough as well as being one ply. Toilet doors are marked with "baño", "S.H." or "SS.HH.". The latter two are abbreviations for servicio higienico, which is the rather formal expression. Expect to pay no more than 20 centimos at public restrooms for paper and 50 cents to 1 dollar to enter the bathroom.

In hostels or budget hotels, you cannot rely on having water all the time. In the Andean region, it also can easily happen that **showers** have more or less hot water only in the afternoon since the water is heated by solar energy only. Electrically heated showers are widespread, but the electric installation is sometimes really dangerous, since the water heater is mostly situated at the shower head. Have a look at it before turning on the shower, especially if you are tall enough that you could touch the cables or other metal while showering and electrocute yourself. Don't be too paranoid, though, as these electric shock is usually painful rather than life-threatening.

As woman, if you use **tampons** during your period, you should bring them with you from home, because they are not very popular in Peru. In Lima, you'll be able to find them in supermarket chains like Tottus, Wong, Metro, Plaza Vea or at drug stores/chemists, known as **farmacias** and **boticas**. When you find them, buy enough for the rest of the trip, as they are virtually unknown in the rest of the country. Alternatively, you could pack a menstrual cup because they are reusable and compact.