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PERU FACTFILE

[The information in this page is supplied in a spirit of 'honest journalism' (recommendations have not been influenced in any way). By the very nature of the depth of information supplied here, however, changes may have occurred since the time of writing. WorldWiseWanderer cannot take responsibility if you miss your bus!]

Is it you?

From the Amazon outpost of Iquitos in the far north to the floating islands of Lake Titicaca Peru offers enough 'adventure' for anyone. Yet it is also easy-going and tranquil...and some of your fondest memories might simply be of sipping Pisco Sours by the plaza in Cuzco or strolling along the colonial boulevards of Lima.

When to go?

Climate varies massively but February and March offer a reasonable balance if you intend to travel in all parts of the country. May to October is 'officially' the dry season in the high Andes but July to September are the busiest (and most expensive) months.

Value factor

Peru caters for all budgets and a hotel room might set you back anything between about £3 and £300...and both are likely to provide memorable experiences! Eating out is particularly good value and much more imaginative than you might expect; a good set lunch in a simple (but 'tourist class') *comedor* can be had for under £2 and a slap-up meal of llama steaks in a nice Cuzco restaurant might cost as much as £15. (Local beer £2, wine substantially more expensive...and delicious hot toddies from late night Andean stalls about 20p!) Peru is a souvenir-hunter paradise but bargain hard.

Essentials

Currency: £1 = 6.35 Nuevo Sol

Time: GMT -5

Country code: 00 51.

Getting there & around

Global Village (Tel: 08704 427770 / www.gvillage.co.uk) offers flights to Lima for around £480 and an onward connection to Cuzco for about £100. The 12-hour flights usually stopover in Miami or Madrid.

Inca Trail Top Tips

1. If you use a local trekking company make sure that they pay and treat the porters well and ensure that they're not underage. Ask how many porters will be supplied for your group – the easiest way for an unscrupulous operator to cut costs is by hiring less guides (though the authorities have now set up checkpoints to try to stop this).
2. Avoid the crowds on the Inca Trail by asking your guides to start early on the first day so that you can cover an extra 2 hours of ground to camp at Llulluchapampa. From there on you have a good chance of staying ahead of the crowd for most of the trek and of having first pick of campsites.
3. For those who want to visit Machu Picchu without resorting to four days on shanks's pony this is possible in air-conditioned tourist trains from Cuzco...or by 20-minute helicopter flight (about £75pp).

Something extra

Global Village (Tel: 08704 427770 / www.gvillage.co.uk) offers a *Peru Encompassed* 15-day overland trucking expedition with Oasis Overland from £690 (including food, but not 'optional excursions') that starts and ends in Lima and combines the Inca Trail with trips to the Ballestas Islands, the Nasca Lines, Arequipa and Cuzco.

Journey Latin America (Tel: 020 8747 8315 / www.journeylatinamerica.co.uk) offers the Inca Trail 5-day trek, exploring the ruins en route and using alternative campsites, away from the crowds. It costs £907, including internal flights and accommodation in Lima.

KE Adventure Travel (Tel: 017687 73966 / www.keadventure.co.uk) 'The Classic Inca Trail,' featuring 6 nights hotels & lodges, 3 nights camping, 4 days trekking. They depart regularly between April and October and the flight-inclusive price is £1640.

What next?

- Comisión de Promoción del Perú (Peru Tourism): tel. +51 1 2243279 / www.peru.org.pe
- Global Village: tel. 08704 427770 / www.gvillage.co.uk
- Journey Latin America: tel. 020 8747 8315 / www.journeylatinamerica.co.uk
- Oasis Overland: tel. 01963 363400 / www.oasisoverland.co.uk
- South American Explorers: Lima tel. +51 1 4453306 / Cuzco tel. +51 84 245484 / www.saexplorers.org

Read:

Lost City of the Incas – Hiram Bingham
The Conquest of the Incas – John Hemmings
Peru, Lonely Planet – Rob Rachowieki
The Inca Trail – Richard Danbury.
The Celestine Prophecy – James Redfield

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THE END