Machu Picchu “the lost city” discovered by Hiram Bingham in 1911, is your ultimate reward after hiking four days amid ancient ruins, across stone trails, camping under the stars of the southern hemisphere.

Prepare yourself for adventure into an ancient civilization shrouded in mystery. Trace the steps of Inca warriors. Find your Spirit amidst the breathtaking Andes Mountain scenery on precipitous slopes overlooking the Urubamba Valley.

The Inca Trail is the most popular organized camping and trekking destination in South America. By the year 2000 as many as 1500 people a day were leaving Cusco to hike on the trail for an almost unrestricted trek across a fragile nature and archaeological environment. In 2001 the Peruvian government initiated restrictions to camp on the Inca Trail. For 2002 these regulations have been greatly increased. Importantly, the number of people allowed to start the hike each day has been limited. And, reservations to enter the Inca Trail are now mandatory.

In previous years most hikers would arrive in Cusco knowing they could deal with a number of local operators so that they could get the lowest possible price for a trek on the trail. With the advent of trail regulations there will now be at any one given time more people wanting to take the trek than the number allowed to enter the trail. Operators will undoubtedly stop competing with each other, and the price for the trail will rise. During the busiest times of the year, May to November, a hiker will find it difficult to arrange a trip on the trail unless they have guaranteed reservations well ahead of their arrival in Cusco.

It is now important for a hiker to understand the types of Inca Trail trips being offered, what the services include, and how the regulations affect their travel plans.

As of March 2002 most of the dates in June and many in July have been booked for the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu.

If the dates of your travel do not allow you to now get reservations on the Inca Trail, check out alternative camping and hiking destinations in Peru at: http://peruperu.com/camping-hiking.htm
New Trekking Regulations 2002

NOTE: New regulations form the Peruvian Government may well be put in force at any time.
These regulations apply to both the 4-day trek from km82/km88 and to the 2-day trek from km108.
Individuals can no longer trek independently.
Reservations must be made at least 2-days prior to leaving on the trail. Note that some operators are now requesting a 5-day reservation minimum.
Trekking company operating the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu must have a government license. This operational license has been granted to about 35 companies.
The number of trekkers entering the trail on any one given day has been regulated to 500 people, less than one-third of the number of people who were on a daily trek during 2000.
The entrance fees for the 4-day trail and Machu Picchu are now US$50 for adults and US$25 for students in possession of an International Student Identity Card (ISIC). The entrance fees for the 2-day trek starting at km108 are US$25 for adults and US$15 for students. Entrance fees for trekking staff such as porters and cooks is a required US$10.
The maximum load that a porter can carry has been limited to 15kg. All porters now have their packs weighed by government officials prior to starting the trek.
Only professionally qualified guides can lead groups on the Inca Trail. Each guide must have a license to work on the Inca Trail. For groups larger than 7 persons an additional guide must be used (can be a trainee). The maximum size of each group is 16 tourists.
The minimum return tourist fare from Aguas Calientes to Cusco is now US$35. The rail company operating the train between Aguas Calientes and Cusco has prohibited tourists from traveling on the local train.

Reservations for the Inca Trail:
Due to restrictions in the number of persons allowed on the Inca Trail it is best advised to make a reservation well in advance. Your operator will submit your name, age, nationality and passport number to the Unidad Gestion Machu Picchu (UGM). The UGM is the government authority responsible for granting entrance tickets for the trail. Upon your arrival in Cusco you must submit a photocopy of your passport to your operator for forwarding to the UGM. This photocopy must be signed in blue. These regulations have been introduced to prevent tour companies from inventing lists of names thereby blocking space for certain days.
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Types of trail Services

Inca Trail Prices & Services: The main difference between the various Inca Trail services are the number of people in the group, the experience and knowledge of your guide, and the quality of the food and camping equipment provided to you. Services are classified into Group Treks and Private Treks.

Group Services: Most operators have fixed departure dates, some have daily departures. You participate in a group that can be as large as 16 persons and is most economical method of doing the Inca Trail if there are just a couple of you. Group trips can be fairly large and people within the group can be of mixed ability. This usually limits the pace of the group and you find yourself camping at some of the larger campsites.

NOTE: With the implementation of regulations for trekking the Inca Trail group prices offered by operators may increase significantly in price, or some operators will offer only a private trip service.

The best quality operators are now charging $450-500 per person for a 5-day group trek.

Group services:
For the 4-day trek prices range between US$140 and US$230 per person.
For the 2-day treks prices are between US$100 to US$150 per person.
Generally this service includes: Hotel pick-up, private bus to start of trek, professional English-speaking guide, assistant guide for groups of 7 and over, entrance fees, 2-person tent, foam mattress, cook with cooking equipment to serve 3 meals per day, porters to carry the tents, food, and cooking equipment, return to Cusco by train.
Excludes: Breakfast on the first morning, snacks along the trail.
Optional: Tourist bus from Machu Picchu to Aguas Calientes, entrance to the thermal springs in Aguas Calientes, and tips for the porters or guide.
Personal porters can be hired to help carry your personal items for $50 for all 4 days and will carry up to a maximum of 15 kg.

Private Services: Private services are arranged just for you and your personal group and you can choose your day of departure. The cost of the guide, cook, porters and food is divided between the members of your group. If you have a group of 6 or more persons the cost per person is considerably reduced and may be well worth considering. If you have a group of 10 then this option can even work out cheaper than the group service. The advantage is that with a private group you can usually make better progress each day and camp at some of the smaller, less-used campsites.

Private services range in price:
How To Plan Your Trip To Peru


For the 2-day treks prices are 1 person: US$400, 2 persons: US$300, 3 persons: US$275, 4 or more persons: US$250.

This service includes: Hotel pick-up, breakfast the first morning, private bus to start of trek, professional English-speaking guide, assistant guide for groups of 7 and over, entrance fees, 2-person tent, foam mattress, cook with cooking equipment to serve 3 meals per day, porters to carry the tents, food, and cooking equipment. Additional comforts such as tables and chairs may also be provided. Your return to Cusco is by train with reserved seating.

Excludes: Snacks along the trail.

Optional: Tourist bus from Machu Picchu to Aguas Calientes., entrance to the thermal springs in Aguas Calientes, and tips for the porters or guide.

Personal porters can be hired to help carry your personal items for $50 for all 4 days and will carry up to a maximum of 15 kg.

NOTE: The above prices should only be used as a guide to help you understand the differences in services and to plan your travel budget. Always check what is included in the cost of the trek when making a reservation.

Do not purchase treks or tours from salespersons working in airports, minibuses or taxes. Quality companies may advertise around Cusco but money should only change hands at the operator’s office where you can be completely satisfied with their services offered.
Typical 4-Day Inca Trail Trek

Day 1 (hike 12km): Travelers are picked-up at 6am from their hotels for a 3.5 hour bus ride past the villages of Chinchero, Urubamba and Ollantaytambo arriving to Kilometer 82 for the start of the Inca Trail.

Hikers cross the Vilcanota River and follow the trail to the right as it climbs steeply up from the river. After passing through a small village, the Inca ruins of Huíllca Raccay come into view high above the Cusichaca River. It is a simple descent down to the river.

The path follows 7Km further along the left bank of the river up to the village of Wayllabamba at 3,000m altitude. Wayllabamba in Quechua means 'grassy plain'. Most group trips spend their first night here while private trekkers may camp further on in a more picturesque area.

Day 2 (hike 11km): Leaving Wayllabamba you hike up to the treeline for about 3 hours arriving at a meadow known as Llulluchapampa at 3,680m. It is another 1.5 hours climb to the first and highest pass of the trail, Abra de Huarmihuañusca, or 'Dead Woman's Pass at 4,200m. This is considered the most difficult section of the trail. The decent from the pass is steep but not difficult. The trail follows the left side of the valley to the valley floor and to the 2nd night's campsite at the 3,600m Pacamayo.

Day 3 (hike 16km): From Pacamayo it takes about an hour to climb up to the ruins of Runkuracay. These small circular ruins occupy a commanding view overlooking the Pacamayo valley below. Another 45-minute hike will bring you to the top of the second pass: Abra de Runkuracay at 4,000m. Here most of the trail is the original Inca stone paving as you descend down steps into a steep pass. A 1-hour hike then brings you to Sayacmarca entranced by a spectacularly-designed stone staircase. The name Sayacmarca means 'Inaccessible Town' and describes the position of the ruins perfectly, protected on three sides by sheer cliffs. The exact purpose of Sayacmarca has yet to be discovered.

Your next stop is Conchamarca, a small Inca dwelling situated in the shadows of Sayacmarca, which was probably a way station for Inca travelers on their way to Machu Picchu. Here you descend into cloud forest full of orchids, tree ferns and flowers, passing through an impressive Inca tunnel, carved into the rock.

The trail then climbs up to the 3rd pass at 3,700m. The view from the pass offers excellent views of several snow-capped peaks including Salkantay (6,271m) and Veronica (5,750m). A few minutes after the pass is Phuyupatamarca, the most impressive Inca ruin so far. The name means 'Town in the Clouds'. Access to the ruins is down a steep flight of stairs passing six 'Inca Baths' probably used for the ritual worship of water.
How To Plan Your Trip To Peru
Leaving the west side of the ruins via an Inca staircase you descend a thousand or so steps. After about an hour of walking through cloud forest you may just be able to see the tin roof of the Trekkers Hostal at Wiñay Wayna, a 2-hour away destination. The Trekkers Hostal is the last official campsite before Machu Picchu, a rustic and most likely over-crowded facility. There is, however, a restaurant where you can purchase food, drinks and beer. Hot showers are available for a small fee and public toilets are available. Most people camp in this area, but if you wish to stay at the hostal, make your reservation ahead of time.

A short trail leaves from the southern end of the hostal to the ruins of Wiñay Wayna. The name in Quechua means 'forever young' and is named after a variety of pink orchid which grows here. The ruins comprise magnificent agricultural terraces set in an impressive location. There are also many buildings of good quality stonework and a sequence of 10 baths, suggesting that the site was probably a religious center associated with the worship of water.

Day 4 (6km): The trail from the hostal to Machu Picchu is clearly marked and takes about 1.5 hours. Most people attempt to wake up at 4.30am so that they can leave Wiñay Wayna by 5.30am to get to Machu Picchu before sunrise. The sky starts getting light by 6am and the first rays of the sun reach Machu Picchu at about 7am. The trail contours a mountainside and drops into cloud forest before coming to an almost vertical flight of 50 steps leading up to the final pass at Intipunku (Sun Gate). Here Machu Picchu awaits your visit. Return to Cusco is by train leaving from Aguas Calientes.
How To Plan Your Trip To Peru

Typical 2-Day Inca Trail Trek

For trekkers short on time or for those not interested in the rigors of the 4-day trek, the 2-day trek encompasses a short hike up a grassy hillside to Wiñay Wayna followed by a couple hours of walking onto Machu Picchu. As with the 4-day version of the Inca Trail regulations prevent individuals from doing the trek solo. You must now employ the services of a professional guide or trek as part of an organized tour group.

Day 1: The trek begins at kilometer 104 (104 kilometers along the railway from Cusco to Aguas Calientes). The trail heads down to the river where you'll find a checkpoint; a gate that guards the bridge over the River Vilcanota. Here you'll have your entrance ticket checked. On the other side of the river the trail heads off to the right towards the ruins of Chachabamba. These ruins, discovered in 1940, are located on the old Inca road that ran along the southern bank of the Urubamba river. The style of buildings and stonework suggest that this was an important religious site, as well as having the secondary function as a gate-house guarding the entrance to Machu Picchu. From Chachabamba the Inca Trail goes south and climbs the hillside, entering some woods and crossing a small stream. The path then turns west and continues uphill leaving the woods for open grassland. The path is clearly marked. After about 2 hours after leaving Chachabamba, the path at last descends into a forest. Within minutes you'll reach a beautiful waterfall, and soon after leave the forest to arrive at the foot of the superb ruins of Wiñay Wayna. To get to the Trekker Hostal, climb up the stairway to the urban area of the terraces, following the stairs off to the right. You then pass a series of Inca baths and follow the trail right to the Hostal. It's a 15-20 minute walk. You will probably find yourself at the Trekkers Hostal for about 3 pm. The majority of tour operators stop here for the night but one or two continue on to Machu Picchu. You may stay in the hostal in basic dormitory beds or you may be camping depending on your trekking company.

Day 2: (hike 6km) The trail from the hostal to Machu Picchu is clearly marked and takes about 1.5 hours. Most people attempt to wake up at 4.30am so that they can leave Wiñay Wayna by 5.30am to get to Machu Picchu before sunrise. The sky starts getting light by 6am and the first rays of the sun reach Machu Picchu at about 7am. The trail contours a mountainside and drops into cloud forest before coming to an almost vertical flight of 50 steps leading up to the final pass at Intipunku (Sun Gate). Here Machu Picchu awaits your visit. Return to Cusco is by train leaving from Aguas Calientes.
How To Plan Your Trip To Peru

What to Bring

Official Papers, Valid passport with photocopy, airline tickets.

City Clothing: Lightweight, easily washable items for city wear (you can store these items at your hotel or some of the Inca Trail operators provide a secured storage room).

Duffel bag (6,000 cu. in., able to easily hold all your gear).
Daypack, 2,000-3,000 cu. in. to carry your camera, water bottles, sweater, etc.
Luggage tags, small locks.
Sleeping bag rated to 10°F.

Clothing:
Medium-weight parka or down jacket.
Rain jacket and pants-jacket should be water repellent and roomy; side-zip pants are recommended.
Midweight fleece or wool sweater.
Wool or flannel shirt.
Long-sleeve shirts.
Short-sleeve T-shirts.
Hiking pants-cotton or lightweight wool (no jeans).
Fleece pants for cold evenings in camp.
Hiking shorts-knee-length or walking shorts are best.
Underwear:
Thermal underwear-synthetic or wool, midweight top and bottom.
Wool or synthetic socks.
Synthetic liner socks.

Footwear:
Lightweight hiking boots-waterproof and well broken-in.
Running or tennis shoes or Teva-type sandals for around camp.

Clothing Accessories:
Bandana, wool or synthetic warm hat, light sun hat with wide brim, midweight wool or synthetic gloves.

Accessories:
Personal first-aid kit, pocket knife, insect repellent, sewing kit, toiletry kit, toilet paper (1 roll), baby wipes. towel and washcloth.
Two 1-liter water bottles or hydration pack.
Compact flashlight or headlamp with spare batteries and bulb.
Plastic bags (various sizes) for items that must stay dry.
Sunscreen and lip balm-SPF 15 or higher, sunglasses.
How To Plan Your Trip To Peru

Optional:
Camera, film and extra batteries.
Passport carrier or money belt.
Stuff sacks for sorting gear.
Garbage bags for laundry/lining inside of duffel bag.
Insect repellent (not usually needed).
Reading and writing materials.
Favorite energy snacks.
Compact binoculars.

Notes
Expect a wide range of temperature and precipitation on your trek. In high mountain environments, you must be prepared for inclement weather at any time. Even at mid-day, if clouds obscure the sun the apparent temperature cools dramatically. By packing a system of thin, independent layers, you can easily add or remove layers to remain comfortable as conditions change. Most trekkers leave camp in the morning wearing a cold-weather layer over T-shirt and shorts. At the first rest stop, after you have warmed up a bit, remove the top layer and continue in hot-weather clothing until the temperature cools off later in the day. At all times you need to carry rain-gear in your day-pack. Basic clothing list: underwear, socks, light hiking boots, sneakers for around camp, loose-fitting long pants or windpants, shorts, T-shirts, long-sleeved shirt, bunting jacket, full rain gear, sun hat, bathing suit, gloves and wool hat.

Cotton is wonderful in warm weather, however, once it becomes wet it will drain your body heat. Plan on bringing at least one synthetic shirt that will maintain its warmth when wet. Examples of these fabrics are Capilene(r), MTS(r) and Thermax(r).

If you plan on purchasing new boots, do so well ahead of time and allow yourself time to break them in. Bring some extra moleskin, Second Skin, or Compeed for fast foot treatment, plus tape.

If you are bringing a camera, include plenty of film and spare batteries. Please note, film is difficult to find and often expensive to purchase.
Weather

From June to August, winter in Peru, days are typically sunny and warm. The temperature can drop to below freezing (27°F -3°C) at night in high camps. Rain seldom falls during winter. This time of year is considered the High Season in Peru and the time most tourists visit the area both for mountain treks in the Andes and for jungle trips to Manu and Tambopata.

From January to March, the Peruvian summer months, daytime temperatures are 85°F 30°C, milder nights (typically to 45°F 8°C) and plenty of rain. Despite some rain, December is a great month for trekking, since the mountains are lush with summer flowers and you enjoy plenty of sunshine. Although this is the off-season for tourism there are good opportunities to enjoy adventures both in the mountains and in the jungle areas for travelers who understand more time might be needed in their travels to accommodate for weather concerns.
Inca Trail Operators

A vast number of travel agencies exist on the world wide web (www) who advertise trips on the Inca Trail. Most of these agencies advertise all-inclusive tours that include Lima hotels, flights to Cusco, sight-seeing trips, and finally the Inca trail hike. All at prices in the thousands of US$, some of which are bargains if you are looking for such a pre-arranged tour.

Up until the year 2002 operators in Cusco offering treks on the Inca Trail saw no need to advertise their service due to the fact trekkers would arrive in Cusco before making their trail arrangements. Hikers knew they could bargain between operators on Cusco’s Plaza de Armas for the lowest price. Only a handful of operators bothered to let the www know of their service. International travel agents, quite frankly, saw the Inca Trail as a low-end product (unless they were selling a complete tour).

With the new regulations in place limiting the number of trekkers allowed on the trail, operators are scrambling to accommodate hikers who want to make reservations one month, two months, or more in advance.

Currently there are a small number of operators who have an international sales representative providing toll-free phone numbers, handling credit card processing, and confirming reservations for just an Inca Trail Trek.

**PeruPeru recommended operator**

- Peruvian Andean Treks: recommended as the most reliable outfitter for Inca Trail Treks, offers 5-day treks for US$485 and 2-day treks for US$258.

**contact** [Andean-Treks@peruperu.com](mailto:Andean-Treks@peruperu.com)
How To Plan Your Trip To Peru

The official list of licensed Inca Trail operators was released on April 12, 2002 by the Unidad Gestion Machu Picchu (UGM):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Inca Trail Operators</th>
<th>Inca Trail Operators</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Peru Field Guides</td>
<td>EcoInka</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peruvian Andes Treks</td>
<td>Inca Trail First Class Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>United Mice Tour Operator</td>
<td>Condor Travel</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South American Sites</td>
<td>Auqui Mountain Spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Peruvain Odyssey</td>
<td>Mayoc Cusco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eco Andes Adventure</td>
<td>Camping Tours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emperadores Tour</td>
<td>Exotic Adventure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apumayo Expediciones</td>
<td>Purishunchis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inca Ways</td>
<td>Sky Viajes Y Turismo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayki Trek</td>
<td>Andes Nature Tours</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Big Foot Operator</td>
<td>Amazonas Explorer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andean Adventures</td>
<td>Tropical American Adventure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kantu Peru</td>
<td>M.A. Travel Agency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inti Kuntur</td>
<td>Inka Wasi Travel Service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Continental Tours</td>
<td>Tambo Trek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural Travel</td>
<td>Explorandes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illapa Culturas Andinas Inversiones</td>
<td>Adventura Latino Americana</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andean Land Adventures</td>
<td>Tierra de los Andes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inversiones Turisticas Intiraymi</td>
<td>Base Camp</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wayra Adventure</td>
<td>Hugo Paullo Alfaro</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makos Tour</td>
<td>Culturas Peru Viajes Y Servicio</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manu Expeditions</td>
<td>Cloud Forest Adventure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instinct</td>
<td>Frontier Expedition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Loreto Tours</td>
<td>Andean Explorer Cusco</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vida Tour</td>
<td>Colibri</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eric Adventures</td>
<td>Inca Explorer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TrekPeru</td>
<td>Eco Service Tour</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Travel Service</td>
<td>Rita Runa</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>