

Peru Information Guide

This document is free to download from our websites; www.southamericatravelsonline.com and www.perutravelsonline.com for anyone who has an interest in travelling to Peru. The document is made up out of several topics ranging from history and weather, to the geography and things to see and do in the region. The document is set up that you will first have a Peru overview, after which each region is handled individually.

We hope you enjoy reading about what may be your next destination and will get as fascinated as us with this amazing and so diverse country!!!

Happy readings,

Your SATO Team

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1) Peru General

1.1) Peru General

Peru, one of the main travel destinations in South America Tours, is maybe mostly known for its Inca civilization but has so much more to offer. Following some Peru facts to grasp your attention; Peru is home to 6 of 8 climate zones on this planet

Peru has some of the driest desert, longest mountain ranges, deepest canyons and largest rainforest in the world

Peru has 21,462 species of plants and animals reported, one of the highest numbers in the world Machu Picchu was elected as one of the “New 7 World Wonders” by an international jury

The Peruvian Coast is over 2,000 Km long

The Amazon River's source can be found in the Peruvian Andes, and has its longest trajectory in this country

Peru is the fifth largest country in South America and together with Brazil and Colombia the most diverse

As you can read, Peru information and Peru facts are endlessly impressive and a source for many people with many different interests to come visit this country for themselves and experience the facts first handed.

The Peruvian territory is home to one of the oldest civilizations on the American continent, dating back to 11.000BC. These civilizations, especially the Moche and Nazca Culture, have left behind famous and intriguing monuments and sites such as Chan Chan, the largest adobe city in the world, and the mysterious Nazca Lines, source of many theories and discussions.

In the eyes of history all of these civilizations were surpassed by the famous Inca culture and their struggle against the Spanish Conquistadores setting foot on land in Peru in the 16th century. The Inca's, known for their amazing architectural and agricultural skills did indeed possess once the biggest territory in the Americas, leaving behind great buildings and structures and impossible places, the best known of course Machu Picchu.

When Francisco Pizarro landed in Lima, he and his fellow conquistadores were immediately blinded by the sheer quantities of gold and silver for hand in these lands. For the Inca population the value of gold and silver was merely religious and symbolic, all transactions in their culture were done in exchange of services and daily needs. For the Spanish on the other hand these precious metals provoked somewhat of a “gold fever” and their lust only grew when reaching the highlands. Taking advantage of the internal division between the northern and southern part of this huge empire, the Spanish managed to use this in their advantage and quite easily march up to Cajamarca and later to Cusco, banishing the remaining Inca population into their last retreats the deep jungle of Southern Peru, and so ending this great empire.

Peru is a Democratic Republic and divided into 25 regions. The geography varies from the desert of the Pacific coast to the high peaks of the Andes and the tropical forests of the Amazon Rainforest. Peru's main economic activities include agriculture, fishing, mining, and manufacturing of products such as textiles.

The main language is Spanish, although a large number of Peruvians speak Quechua (especially in the highlands) or other native languages.

Peruvian culture is primarily rooted in Amerindian and Spanish traditions, though it has also been influenced by various African, Asian, and European ethnic groups. Peruvian artistic traditions date back to the elaborate pottery, textiles, jewelry, and sculpture of Pre-Inca cultures. The Incas maintained these crafts and elaborated architectural achievements including the construction of Machu Picchu and other Inca Sites on impressive locations. Baroque dominated colonial art, though modified by native traditions. During this period, most art focused on religious subjects; the numerous churches of the era and the paintings of the Cuzco School are representative. Arts stagnated after independence until the emergence of Indigenismo in the early 20th century.

Peruvian music has Andean, Spanish and African roots. In pre-Hispanic times, musical expressions varied widely from region to region; the quena and the tinya were two common instruments. Spanish conquest brought the introduction of new instruments such as the guitar and the harp, as well as the development of crossbred instruments like the charango. African contributions to Peruvian music include its rhythms and the cajónperuano, a percussion instrument, shaped as a wooden box with a hole in one side. The instrument is played by moving it back and forth to enhance or dim the sounds.

Peruvian folk dances include marinera, tondero and of course the impressive Baila de los Tijeras, the Scissors dance. Peru's modern culture certainly reflects the impressive pre-Columbian civilizations that flourished here before the arrival of the Spanish. Perhaps it are the the Peru events and festivals that best display the vivid mixture of native and Spanish cultural aspect found throughout the modern Peru history. There is no escaping Peru history if you choose to come here, and this makes it a top destination for people looking for an adventures and historically interesting holiday.

If this Peru information does not already entice you to start looking into a Peru vacation, we would like to invite you to read the other pages with Peru facts and information about its regions to find out more.

1.2) Peru History

Peru history generally begins with traces of human presence dating as far back as 11000 BC. The Chico civilization is known to represent one of the oldest cultures known to mankind, and they occupied territory along the Pacific coast from approximately 3000-1800 BC. Around the year 1250 BC, civilizations moving in from the north began to establish settlements near the ocean in the dry, desert region of Peru.

These civilizations would be known as cultures including the Chavin, Mochica (Moche), Nazca and Chimu. Around the northern Peru cities of Trujillo and Chiclayo, the Moche ruins that have resulted from this civilization surely provide insight into early Peruvian history, and if you are traveling in northern Peru, they are a recommended visit. After the Moche, the Chimu came to inhabit the Moche Valley, near Trujillo. Their adobe city of Chan Chan, the biggest adobe city in the world, is among the top archaeological sites in the country, and it also begs a visit if you are in the area. In terms of the pre-Columbian groups that figure into the history of Peru, the Chimu were most capable of stopping the Inca. However, the Inca, who rose from just a small tribe, would conquer the Chimu on their way to establishing the largest pre-Columbian empire in the Americas.

The Inca, whose cities produced some of the most identifiable of all Peru attractions, started out small, but grew exponentially in under 400 years. The Inca civilization begins with a myth as to the origins of its founder. According to this myth, the first Inca king, Manco Capac, emerged from an island in Lake Titicaca. Born with his sister, Mama Ocllo, by the sun god, Inti, he would go on to establish the Inca Kingdom of Cusco. Cusco would become their first city-state, and it would remain the capital of their empire until the coming of the Spanish Conquistadors in the 16th century. The actual Inca Empire was not officially founded until the Inca ruler, Pachacutec, began to rapidly expand the Inca civilization in the year 1438. It was during the rule of Pachacutec that the fortresses of Pisac and Ollantaytambo were built, as well as Qoricancha in Cusco, and the venerable Machu Picchu. The Sacred Valley near Cusco is the best place to see Inca ruins, and many visitors come here every year to hike the Inca Trail. In the Peruvian Highlands you can still hear descendants of the Inca speaking the Inca Quechua language to this day, and it remains a large part of the culture of Peru.

The Inca, like every other concurrent native culture in Latin America, would eventually see the Spanish invasion essentially bring a permanent end to their empire. Francisco Pizarro, a conquistador of importance, first arrived with his men in Peru around 1529. After scouting about and returning to Spain, he returned in 1532 with permission to conquer the Inca and establish a Spanish hold. The most notable battle between the Spanish and the Inca occurred in that same year.

The Battle of Cajamarca saw the Spanish capture, imprison and kill the last great Inca ruler, Atahualpa. Just a decade later, the Viceroyalty of Peru was created by the Spanish Crown. This viceroyalty was the most powerful in the Americas. The Spanish would convert the majority of the native peoples to Catholicism and begin to erect their notable Spanish colonial architecture. Most Peru cities, like Lima, Cusco, Arequipa and so on, have plenty in the way of beautiful Spanish colonial architecture.

Lima became the capital of Peru in 1535, and was founded by Pizarro as the Ciudad de los Reyes (City of the Kings). By the late 1700's, the native peoples of Peru began to grow tired of Spanish rule. The 1780 revolt led by Inca Tupac Amaru (José Gabriel Condorcanqui) saw some 60,000 natives rise up against the Spanish Crown, and though unsuccessful, the seeds of revolution were being planted. The one-time Argentine soldier, José de San Martín, led an invasion on Spanish Lima on July 12, 1821. 16 days later, on July 28, Peru would proclaim its independence. Later struggles would see the Venezuelan-born Simon Bolívar continue to fight the Spanish.

The first years of independence were marked by the economic growth, but also by conflicts with the neighboring countries, also recently being liberated from the Spanish Crown. Peru was defeated by Chile in the 1879–1883 War of the Pacific, losing part of Southern Peru to Chile. The modern Peru history is a mix of economic successes, financial downfall and internal struggles. Especially during the 1980s, Peru faced a considerable external debt, ever-growing inflation, provoking a surge in drug trafficking, and massive political violence. In 1990 Alberto Fujimori was elected president (winning the elections from 2010 Nobel Prize winner Mario Vargas Llosa) and the country started to recover; however in his second presidency, accusations of authoritarianism, corruption, and human rights violations forced his resignation after the controversial 2000 elections. Since the end of the Fujimori regime, Peru has tried to fight corruption while sustaining economic growth; since 2006 the president is Alan García. 2011 is a presidential election year and the main candidates were; Alejandro Toledo (Peruvian Ex President), Luis Castañeda (Ex mayor of Lima), Ollanta Humala (Nationalistic ex military), Keiko Fujimori (daughter of Ex president Alberto Fujimori) and Pedro Pablo Kuczynski (Ex first minister under Toledo). The first round was won by Ollanta Humala and Keiko Fujimori, who will be disputing the presidency in the second round in June this year.

1.3) Peru Museums

It seems that there are many nice museums in Peru wherever you choose to go. Of course, the country's biggest cities are where you will find the most extensive Peru museums, and visiting those helps one gain insight and background knowledge into the history of Peru. The Peru museums do not only give you a good impression of the different and interesting cultures and civilizations that have lived in this territory, but can also take you through histories of local art, with especially the Cusco School standing out when it comes to paintings. Following we will try to give you an overview of the different museums in Peru.

As most international flights arrive in the capital city of Lima, it is definitely worth spending a day or two in Lima. This time you can use to visit some of the most important museums in Peru. Among the best Lima museums is the Museo Arqueológico Rafael Larco Herrera. This museum holds the largest, private pre-Columbian art collection in the world. The art revolves primarily around the Moche civilization, and their ceramics of high quality. The Sala Erótica (Erotic Room), is among the most visited exhibits in all of Peru, and it is likely to turn you a bit red in the face. If you are more interested in the Inca culture, and a more comprehensive look at past Peruvian art and history, your best choice would be the Museo de la Nación. Furthermore the Museo de Oro has an impressive collection of gold & silver artifacts from ancient cultures. The famous Tumi you will find in this Peru Museum.

Another lesser known museum worth a visit is the private Enrico Poli Museum. This smaller museum holds a nice collection of lesser known objects out of the time of the Conquistadores and has an interesting collection of paintings, many from the Cusco School.

As this may have triggered your interest to visit Cusco, keep in mind that Cusco besides boasting Inca walls and nearby ruins, the city itself is a sort of living museum. If you skipped the Larco Herrera museum in Lima, or would like to have more information, you can find exhibits at the Museo de Arte Precolombino, which display pieces taken entirely from the Lima Museum. The art here focuses on all notable periods of Peru history. Another large city with a great historic past is Arequipa, with its beautiful city centre. It is in Arequipa that you will find one of the most famous Inca artifacts. The Museo Santuarios Andinos exhibits the mummified Ice Maiden of Ampato as its principal exhibit. Nicknamed Juanita, the Inca maiden was sacrificed by Inca priests on the top of a snowcapped mountain near Arequipa, the icy conditions conserving her in almost perfect condition. Furthermore in Arequipa, you will find one of the best religious museums in Peru. The Monasterio de Santa Catalina is set in a large convent that was built in the 16th century. Not exhibiting artworks on a permanent basis, the Monastery is definitely worthwhile a visit as a living museum in Peru, still inhabited by nuns.

In northern Peru, near the city of Chiclayo, the Museo Tumbas Reales de Sipan is considered to be one of the best museums in Peru. Located in the city of Lambayeque, this recently modernized museum is home to one of the country's top exhibits. Part museum, part mausoleum, the Sipan museum displays hundreds of the most important findings of the last years in Peru.

This list is far from complete but does contain the most famous and recognized museums in Peru. These are of course to complement a trip to the famous sites these museum represent such as the temple of the Sun and The Moon, Chan Chan, Choquequirao, Ollantaytambo, Kuelap en of course Machu Picchu.

1.4) Peru Geography

The Peruvian territory extends more or less between the equator and 18°S. It has a long coastline on the Pacific Ocean and is bordered by Ecuador on the north, Brazil and Bolivia on the east, and Chile on the south. Being such a large country with such varied geographical zones, you can find almost any type of climate in Peru, only reinforcing the diversity of this amazing country.

Peru's territory has an area of 1,285,216 km², making it the fifth biggest country in South America. Looking at the Peru map, one can see it is bordered by Ecuador and Colombia on the north, Brazil and Bolivia to the east, and Chile and Bolivia to the south. To the west lies the Pacific Ocean. Peru divides into three major regions: the Costa (Coast), Sierra (Highlands), and Selva (Amazon Basin).

The Costa is a relatively narrow strip of desert along the entire coast. It is widest in the north, where much of the land consists of shifting sand and dunes. Elsewhere the Costa is generally a thin strip of dry semi desert land bordering with the rising slopes of the Peru Mountains of the Andes, at times with some broader areas at river deltas, many of which are agricultural oases.

The strip is not continuous; in some areas the mountains extend all the way to the sea. Lima, the nation's capital, and many of Peru's largest cities are located in this region, on the banks of the rivers coming from the Sierra. The coast also enjoys the best road system of Peru, having the Panamerican Highway (the longest highway in the world) passing along the entire coast from Ecuador to Chile.

The Sierra is a broad highland region, east of the Costa. It consists of rugged snowcapped Andes mountain ranges, active volcanoes, deep canyons and a number of stretched highlands. Peru's highest peak, Huascarán, is a snowcapped volcano rising 6,768 m above sea level. The Peru mountains range is made out of different smaller "cordilleras" running throughout the country. The most famous being the Cordillera Blanca in the northern Peru mountains, for its amazing trekking, and The Cordillera Vilcanote in the southern Peru mountains as it borders with the Sacred Valley and leads up to Machu Picchu. Furthermore, Lake Titicaca, the largest freshwater lake in South America and the highest navigable in the world lies in the Southern Peru Mountains, both partly in Peru and partly in Bolivia. It occupies part of a high plateau shared with Bolivia called the Altiplano and is about 3,810 m above sea level.

The Amazon Basin or Selva, east of the Sierra, is a heavily forested lowland region that takes up around 60% of Peru's territory. Most of the Amazon Basin and is still unsettled and very little inhabited. Travel is in many places restricted to air travel or via river. This is mainly because of its remote location and dense tropical jungle. This area also contains the largest areas of protected forest and natural parks within Peru.

The large rivers of Peru spring in the Peru mountains and flow through the Amazon Basin; almost all are part of the Amazon fluvial system, ending with the mighty Amazon River itself. Among these influents are the Ucayali and Marañon, the two chief headstreams of the Amazon, and the Putumayo, Napo, Pastaza, Huallaga, Apurímac and Urubamba River. The actual Amazon River proper begins just above the city of Iquitos. A number of rivers, all of them short, drain from the Andes to the Pacific. Most of them dry up during part of the year, but their waters are extremely important for irrigation along the coast. Most coastal settlements are located at the deltas of these rivers.

1.5) Peru Climate

The Peru climate is marked by the different regions of Peru and hence their location. As Peru can be largely divided into three regions; the Coast, the Andean Highlands and the Amazon Basin, it is clear that all these regions present different climates and temperatures.

The Peruvian Pacific Coast, more than 2000Km long is mainly made up out of desert. This desert, the outskirts of the world's driest desert, the Atacama Desert in Chile, brings along several of the typical characteristics of a desert climate. Very dry, warm days and somewhat colder nights are something that can be found for large parts of the year on the coastal area of Peru. Peru temperatures for this region do differ somewhat from month to month, but in general day temperatures are warm and dry. The temperatures here are in general warm all year round with higher temperatures from December to March, when the summer hits.

As this is the case for most of the Northern and Southern Coast, Lima does have another phenomenon having a rather large influence on the climate in the capital. As the Humboldt Current comes close to land in the Lima area, bringing cold water that clashes with the warm air coming from the mainland. This creates a strange kind of smog, covering large parts of the city, especially the coastal districts.

The Peru weather in the Andean highlands depends largely on the altitude. As the Andean mountain range in Peru reaches tops over 6000m, it is clear that this an important factor when it comes to climate. The Andean Highlands, as the rest of Peru, has two seasons; the dry season and the wet season. The dry season is from April to late October, having very little rain and plenty of strong sun. The days are very nice and relatively warm, due to the sun, but in the evening the nights are colder than in the wet season due to the clear skies. The wet season starts around mid-November, with its highpoint mostly around January / February. Rain is mostly at night but cannot be discarded during the days. Especially February can have pretty heavy showers. On the eastern slopes of the Andes towards the Amazon basin, the Peru weather changes with the altitude you come down. As you will quite rapidly transfer from highlands to Rainforest, the temperatures and especially humidity levels will increase quickly, the more you go down.

Once in the Amazon Basin, you have reached the third and largest Peru weather zone in the country; the Amazon Rainforest. This area is also known for having two seasons, with as main difference the quantity of rain. Even though the Amazon Rainforest can have showers all year round, the wet season (December – February) does contain more rain, making it a bit better to see wildlife. Temperatures are warm all year round, but drop a bit around June / July. Humidity levels are quite high and rise in the wet season a bit.

This is just a small summary of the Peru weather and the Peru temperatures in the three main regions. Another Peru climate factor is “ El Niño” a 3-5 yearly returning weather phenomenon provoking higher temperatures for some and more rain for other regions.

1.6) Things to see in Peru

Making a list of the tourist attractions in Peru is not an easy task seeing at the extremes this large country offers. Peru tourist attractions come in all shapes and sizes, and when you start looking into a Peru vacation, you will find that you may have to make sacrifices in what to see and do in one trip. Peru is a country that is blessed with a varying landscape of astounding beauty. You can spend a few days in a desert oasis; follow it up with a hike in the Andes, and then head down into the Amazon Basin for a jungle adventure. With so many attractions in Peru, on first sight it does not look like a country where you will spend a lot of time “relaxing”. Nevertheless this is far from true, having beautiful beaches and lodges in the north, under a year round sun, enjoying some of the nicest hotels and Spa’s in South America, and of course the culinary wonders this country has to offer; from food stands on the street to restaurant located in ancient ruins, it is all possible in Peru!!!

Following we will try to give you an overview of the main types of Peru tourist attractions you may expect when coming to Peru;

Discovering ancient cultures

Most people coming to Peru are here first and foremost to visit the most famous Peru tourist attraction; the Inca citadel of Machu Picchu. Visiting Machu Picchu is mainly done from the other famous city; the ancient capital of the Inca Empire, Cusco. In Cusco, you can see Inca walls, which now serve as the bases of the more modern colonial Spanish structures built on top of them, creating a very particular building style. From here one also can visit the other smaller sites of Ollantaytambo, Pisac and the lesser but equally impressive site of Choquequirao. The Sacred Valley and the Cusco region aren't the only place to see great the remnants of ancient civilizations. This list would not be complete leaving out the mysterious Nazca Lines in southern Peru. These lines, subject to multiple explanations and discussions are a wonder to see, you can see them partially from a watch tower close to the Panamericana, but are best viewed from the air in a short flight from Nazca or Ica. In northern Peru there are a number of sites, all potential mayor tourist attractions in Peru, but on average little know. First of all there is the huge site of Chan Chan close to Trujillo. This site, the biggest adobe city in the world, is one of the main sites of the Moche Culture, a pre Colombian civilization in northern Peru. The Sun and Moon temple, the biggest pyramids in Peru are also from this culture. Furthermore you have in Cajamarca part of the original chamber where the Spanish held Inca Atahualpa prisoner for large sums of gold and silver. You can also visit the probable battle field at the Baños del Inca, where the Inca's suffered their first and maybe most important defeat against the Spanish. Finally one very little but definitely worthwhile trip would be to the Ruins of Kuelap, another pre Colombian civilization located in the central northern highlands. This is a relatively new discovered culture and excavations are still going on discovering more and more about this little known culture.

Shopping

You may have seen and heard the pan flutes in your home country as this is the "export" music and tunes well known all over the world. These tunes come together with the players in colorful ponchos and were better to find one than on the Peruvian markets. Peru is known for its artisanal products, for its wool and its ceramics. All these products can be found easily, cheap and of great quality in Peru. You would not be the first visitor not being able to resist to the colorful jumpers and hats being offered here. For shopping the bigger cities are maybe your best choice; Lima, Cusco, Arequipa, they all have large artisanal markets close to the city centre where you can find almost anything you would imagine from a Peru artisanal market. Nevertheless, on the main Peru attractions when it comes to shopping is without doubt the market of Pisac. This market covering several blocks of this small town is famous for all the artisanal products you can find here in a typical Andean atmosphere.

Hiking

Without doubt, one of the main Peru tourist attractions would be the awesome hiking and trekking this country offer. Being home to the largest mountain range in the world, the Andes, Peru is a Mecca for all who look for high altitude adrenaline and flabbergasting mountain views. The number of hikes is endlessly and the levels of difficulty vary a lot. You can hike ancient Inca Trails, climb “top of the world” mountains, and hike down to the Amazon basin or even do it all in one. The most famous hike is without doubt the Inca Trail taking you via the ancient way to Machu Picchu. This popular hike does sell out quickly, but no worries the options are plenty; Salkantay or Lares taking you through the true Peruvian highlands also ending in Machu Picchu, or what about Choquequirao or Espiritu Pampa, two lesser known important Inca sites, the latter being the last refuge of the Inca’s after the fall of Cusco. In the north of Peru we find the famous Cordillera Blanca and the Huascarán, the highest mountain of Peru. The nice thing about the treks in northern Peru is the fact that the starting points are relatively accessible from Lima. No matter what type of hiking you may be looking for, we are positive that Peru can offer it. Finally in southern Peru we find another extreme, the two deepest canyons in the world, both twice as deep as the Grand Canyon in the USA, and located at 3 hours from Arequipa, the Cotahuasi Canyon; the deepest in the world and only challenged in his beauty by the nearby Colca Canyon, only 150 meters less profound and home to the famous condors. Together with the Misti Volcano, without doubt the best hiking possibilities in Southern Peru.

Surfing

Agreed, Peru may not be the first destination you may think of when thinking about surfing, but nothing is lesser true. Surf culture always has been big in Peru and the last couple of years this is starting to pay off. With the organization of the Women’s World Championship in 2008 in Mancora, the recent won world title for teams; it is safe to say that surfing is the next big thing in Peru. Having good waves all over the north coast from Lima to the border with Ecuador, especially Lima and Mancora are known for its surfing beaches. As Lima weather only allows one to enjoy the waves a couple of months a year, we would recommend going to the beaches at Mancora and combining a couple of days relaxing with surfing classes. For the advanced surfers, in Chicama you will find the longest wave in the world.

Besides the surfing on waves there is another type of surf Peru has to offer; Sand boarding. This is done on a surf board greased up with wax and then sliding you down some of the highest sand dunes in the world. A buggy will take you into the desert and drive you up these gigantic dunes for a slide full of adrenaline down to the foot of the dune. The best sand boarding you can find in the Huacachina Oasis or in Nazca.

Marvel at the natural beauty of the Amazon Rainforest

Off course this list wasn’t complete without including the largest part of Peru, the Amazon Rainforest. This Peru tourist attraction is full of amazing discoveries and adventures. National parks such as Manu and Tambopata hold some of the most pristine and untouched Rainforest on the continent. Head down on some of the many waterways through this dense forest in a canoe, walk over a canopy walkway through the forest treetops, fishing for piranhas, evening walks, these are all experiences part of a jungle stay. Of course there are other activities such as visiting indigenous villages and doing overnight camping trips. For the more luxury seekers, from Iquitos you can embark one of the luxury cruise boats doing multiple day cruises on the Amazon River.

As you can read from the above, Peru will not easily bore you and make you fall from one extreme into another. Desert Oasis, snowcapped mountains, lost civilizations and cities, and the sheer magnitude and wilderness of one of the greatest and deepest jungles in the world...all into one country....how about a unique travel destination...

1.7) Peruvian Gastronomy

People working in the world of gastronomy may be familiar with the phenomenon, but Peruvian food is one of the hottest things in the modern world of cooking. Ceviche, famous in so many countries and forms is a plate that originates out of Peru. The raw, lemon cooked fish served with red onion and corn is probably the national plate of Peru. Ceviche is served in almost any Lima restaurant and is the pride of the coast. The coastal region of Peru is famous and proud of its variety of seafood and fish in different forms of preparations.

Peru has made its name as being a fusion kitchen, meaning that they excel in combining the local kitchen with different flavors and ingredients coming to Peru via immigrants and Peruvians returning from years abroad. The best example is probably the Chifa restaurant, a vivid mixture of Oriental dishes finished off with a typical Peruvian touch. Momentarily Peru is making a move on the Italian Pizza, giving the adobe ovens often found in Andean households a new function. In the highlands the dishes are more potato and corn based; two domestic crops in the highlands. The potato and corn have had a very significant and religious value for the Incas as they did represent the main source of nutrition. Meat is limited to mainly alpaca, pork and –for foreigners the strangest- guineapig. The guineapig is quite the delicacy in the highlands and eaten in different forms.

The Amazon basin as well has their own set of flavors and dishes. Plenty of fruits, exotic vegetables, and exotic animals, complete the wide variety of products to be found in this country.

No wonder Peruvian chefs are finding their way among the top chefs of the world and why Peruvian restaurants serving plates such as; Lomo Saltado, Aji de Gallina, Ceviche, Papa a la Huancaína and Butifarra's, are becoming one of the bigger export products of Peru.

Besides all this Peru food, there is also of course the Peru drinks; The one and only Peruvian market leader in soft drinks is without doubt Inca Cola, the bright yellow and incredible sweet choice of Peru. But the real Peruvian proud when it comes to drinks is undeniable Pisco. This firewater made out of grapes, is the one drink in South America that is responsible for a "silent war" between Peru and Chile, both claiming to be the birth ground of Pisco. Nevertheless, most sources do give the advantage to the Peruvian claim. A Peruvian use of the liquor is the Pisco Sour, a cocktail made out of Pisco, egg white, lime juice, some sugar and crushed ice, cannot be missed when visiting Peru.

Another Peruvian wonder drink is the Mate de Coca, best made from fresh coca leaves in hot water. Coca, grown legally in Peru for ancestral purposes is still widely used in the Andes. Farmers chew it to suppress hunger, to have less fatigue and to keep alert. The most likely way to get in contact with coca is the mate de coca, recommendable for visitors new to the highlands; this tea is known for its soothing effects against the effects of altitude or altitude sickness.

Of course this is only a limited list of all the gastronomic experiences and diversity of Peru food, but if this made you hungry and thirsty, do not hesitate to contact us for more information and tips on our favorite restaurants serving Peruvian food.

2) Lima

2.1) Lima General

Lima, Peru; home to about 10 million of Limeños, 30% of the country's population, is the fifth biggest city in Latin America after Mexico City, Sao Paulo, Buenos Aires and Rio de Janeiro. Due to its longstanding history as one of the more important capitals in South America, not only did the population of Lima Peru increase to numbers equal to a small country, but also did manage to maintain some of its grandeur of past centuries and even regaining terrain in the new fast moving worldwide economy.

Lima was founded by Spanish conquistador Francisco Pizarro on January 18, 1535, as La Ciudad de los Reyes, or "The City of Kings." Known for its splendor at the time, it became the capital and most important city in the Spanish Viceroyalty of Peru, covering almost half of the continent. Following the Peruvian War of Independence, it became the capital of the Republic of Peru.

The urban area of Lima covers about 800 km², largely the size of Belgium and Holland together. Located on mostly flat terrain in the Peruvian coastal plain, Lima is the second biggest desert town in the world, after Cairo, Egypt. Mainly flat but having some hills located within the city limits, Lima also borders to the beginning slopes of the Andes, some of the extensive slums build against these slopes on the outskirts of Lima. The population of Lima Peru, love their city, something for the first time visitor hard to understand but once you let yourself being entangled in this city and its habitants you will grasp why.

With a municipal population of almost 10 million people, Lima ranks as the 27th most populous 'agglomeration' in the world. Its population features a very complex mix of racial and ethnic groups. Mestizos of mixed Amerindian and European ancestry are the largest ethnic group. European Peruvians are the second largest group. Other large ethnic groups in Lima are the Chinese and the Japanese. The influx of Chinese workers in the 19th and 20th century, make that the Lima Peru population holds the largest community of Chinese in South America.

Lima is the industrial and financial center of Peru, and one of the most important financial centers in Latin America. Today it is home to many national and international companies. It accounts for more than two thirds of Peru's industrial production and most of its service sector.

The financial district is located in the district of San Isidro, while much of the industrial activity takes place in the area stretching west of downtown Lima to the airport in Callao. Lima has the largest exportation industry in South America, and it is a regional hub for the operational cargo industry. Many of this industry organized around Callao, one of the largest and oldest harbors in South America.

Lima's architecture is characterized by a mix in styles as reflected from shifts between trends throughout various time periods of the city's history. Examples of early colonial architecture include such structures as the Monastery of San Francisco, the Cathedral of Lima and the Torre Tagle Palace. The 21st century has seen the appearance of glass skyscrapers, particularly around the city's financial district. Lima's urban setting is characterized by lime green-lined streets as well as the abundance of plazas throughout the city. More important streets usually contain wider green areas, and plazas usually contain monuments or statues of historical figures of importance to Peruvian history. The Lima City centre is also home to the largest fountain complex in the world known as the Magical Circuit of Water. Nevertheless the increasing planned urbanization in Lima, Lima is still suffering in many ways of the fast and unplanned growth during the 19th and 20th century. Lima traffic can be horrible at times, public transport is widely available but hard to understand for outsiders and contamination levels may be high at times. Even though Lima is getting increasingly developed, you will still see lots of poverty as the expansive growth of Lima mostly affected the outskirts with gigantic slums expanding all the way to the foot of the Andes. Lima's beaches, located along the northern and southern ends of the city, are heavily visited during the summer months. Numerous restaurants, clubs and hotels have been opened in these places to serve the many beachgoers.

Being the major point of entry to the country, the financial, political and urban capital of Peru, Lima has developed an important tourism industry, characterized by its historic center, archeological sites, nightlife, museums, art galleries, festivals, and popular traditions. Lima is home to an ample range of restaurants and bars where local as well as international cuisine is served. Lima is probably one of the culinary capitals of South America and more and more trendsetter on worldwide level.

The city's historic centre is located in the Cercado de Lima district, "El Centro", and it is home to most of important buildings of Lima's colonial past, the Presidential, the Metropolitan Municipality of Lima, and dozens of hotels, some operating and some defunct, that used to cater to the national and international elite. Especially Hotel Bolivar is worth mentioning for its art nouveau decoration and the fact they claim to have invented the Pisco Sour, the Peruvian aperitif.

The upscale San Isidro district is the city's financial center. It is home to many prominent figures and is also where the main banks of Peru and branch offices of world banks are headquartered. The other, probably best known upscale district is Miraflores, which has many luxury hotels, shops and restaurants. Miraflores has more parks and green areas in the south of Lima than most other districts. Larcomar, a popular shopping mall and entertainment center built on cliffs overlooking the Pacific Ocean, featuring bars, dance clubs, movie theaters, cafes, shops, boutiques and galleries, is also located on the coast in this district. The coast is called Costa Verde and is being elaborated to be one of the bigger parks and seaside walks in Peru.

Barranco, which borders Miraflores by the Pacific Ocean, is known as the city's bohemian district, home or once home of many Peruvian writers and intellectuals. Whatever you may be looking for in a South American city, Lima has it all; history, shopping, culture, gastronomy, nightlife and even beaches. Therefore you often hear that Lima is a missed chance. Many people do not take the time to get to know this city and its people...something essential to understand Peru.

2.2) Lima History

Lima, the proud capital of Peru, holding almost on third of the population and having one of the longest histories of all capital on the continent was founded by the conquistador Francisco Pizarro in 1535 on the deltas of the Rimac River. The city was founded on the foundations of an Inca city. The Cathedral on the main square is completely built over the ruins of an Inca temple. The Incas arrived here from the highlands after that the area had seen many fascination civilizations, the last being the Moche civilization. This civilization got "incorporated" into the Inca world as did many other people throughout their in the end vast empire. Proof of this mixture of cultures can be found at the Pachacamac ruins near Lima. This was a sacred place for both civilizations.

On arrival of Pizarro, the city quickly became the trade centre for the Spanish conquistadores, bringing over food, soldiers, horses and taking back to Spain the vast quantities of gold and silver they conquered. Lima got sieged by the Incas in several occasions but the Spanish managed to keep the upperhand in all occasions and once dealt with the main Inca resistance in the country, Lima became the capital of the Viceroyalty of Peru, a territory much bigger than nowadays Peru. From here all Spanish interests were managed and excursion into the new found land would be coordinated. Lima became known as La Ciudad de los Reyes, the city of Kings.

Situated on the "ring of fire", Lima has suffered from several devastating earthquakes that left the city in ruins, ready to get rebuilt. Nevertheless Lima was able to maintain its importance as a trading city and harbor until far in the War of the Pacific when the Chilean army occupied Lima. The city got looted and shot back several years in time. After this for Peru very impactful war Peru tumbled into a crisis and many people from the highlands started moving to Lima. Lima became more and more the central nerve system of the country, having all important entities and institutions in one city. After another earthquake in the 40's, Lima became even more overcrowded and the large unplanned urbanization of the huge city began.

Today Lima is a city of love and hate, beauty and ugly, a city of extremes. It is an unavoidable stop when visiting Peru, and reasonable as well as 1/3rd of the Peruvian people live and work here. It is the cultural, intellectual, financial and political centre of the entire country and one will never understand Peru without having seen Lima.

2.3) Lima Museums

Lima museums; as many capitals with great history Lima has a large number of museums. Some smaller some larger, all dedicated to different parts of Peruvian history, culture and arts. Following we will try to give you an overview of the most important Lima museums.

The Museum of the Nation is one of two major museums of Peruvian history in Lima, Peru. It is much larger than the other main museum in Lima, the Peruvian National Museum of Archaeology, Anthropology, and History. The Museum of the Nation houses thousands of artifacts spanning the entire span of human occupation in Peru, including an impressive collection of Moche, Nazca, and Wari ceramics. The museum also houses reproductions of many famous ancient Andean artifacts, most notably the Lanzón from Chavín de Huantar ; a recreation of the burial chamber of the Lord of Sipan (El Señor de Sipán); and the famous Revolt of the Objects Mural. The 6th floor of the museum houses the photographic exhibit Yuyanapaq. Para Recordar. This exhibit was created by the Truth and Reconciliation Commission to document the internal conflict in Peru that occurred from 1980-2000.

The Museo Nacional de Arqueología Antropología e Historia del Perú (English: National Museum of the Archaeology, Anthropology, and History of Peru) is the largest and oldest state museum in Peru, located on Plaza Bolívar in the Pueblo Libre district of Lima. The museum houses more than 100,000 artifacts spanning the entire history of human occupation in what is now Peru. Highlights include the Raimondi Stela and the Tello Obelisk from Chavín de Huantar, and an impressive scale model of the Inca citadel, Machu Picchu.

The Larco Museum (Spanish: Museo Arqueológico Rafael Larco Herrera) is a privately owned museum of pre-Columbian art, located in the Pueblo Libre District of Lima, Peru. The museum is housed in an 18th century vice-royal mansion built over a 7th century pre-Columbian pyramid. It showcases chronological galleries that provide a thorough overview of 4,000 of Peruvian pre-Columbian history. It boasts one of the world's largest collections of pre-Columbian art including Moche, Nazca, Chimú, and Inca pieces. Additionally, the Larco Museum is well known for its gallery of pre-Columbian erotic pottery.

The Gold Museum The showcases of the “Gold Museum of Peru” display the craftsmanship of several centuries of Peruvian history, mainly in pre-Inca gold. There are decorative items of all the cultures, such as, embossed and weaved nose ornaments with cut stone pendants; sets of filigree figures depicting birds, men, or monkeys; mantles, bracelets and earflaps of the Vicus culture; lizards, weasels, felines, bags of coca leaves, earrings and belts of the Frias culture; pectorals with zoomorphic designs, flat or embossed crowns of the Chancay culture; funerary masks with twisted rays or serpents from Ica; and masks with open mouths and teeth, wristbands, shin protectors and spatulas of the Nazca culture. It also contains an impressive collection of weapons and textiles.

2.4) Lima Geography

Lima geography is dominated by its location. Stretched on a mostly flat terrain in the Peruvian coastal plain, caught between the Pacific Ocean and the beginning slopes of the Andes, already rising to 500 meter above sea level within the city boundaries, Lima nevertheless is a desert city. Being the second biggest desert city in the world, after Cairo Egypt, apart from the typical plains within Lima geography exist isolated hills which are not connected to the surrounding hill chains of the beginning Andes. The San Cristobal hill, one of the most outstanding in the Lima geography, located in the Rimac district, which faces directly north of the downtown area, is the local extreme of an Andean hill outgrowth. Metropolitan Lima has an area of 2,672.28 km². The urban area extends around 60 km from north to south and around 30 km from west to east. The city center is located 15 km inland at the shore of the Rimac River. While no official administrative definition for the city exists, it is usually considered to be composed of the central 30 out of the 43 districts of Lima Province, corresponding to an urban area centered around the historic Cercado de Lima district.

2.5) Lima Weather

The Lima weather is in contrary to what people might think not the hot dry desert climate we know from other desert cities in the world. Lima weather is mainly dominated by some additional circumstances created by its location. Perched between the Andes Mountains and the Pacific Ocean, Lima has two air currents affecting the Lima weather. The Humbolt Current coming from the South of the Continent and the northern warmer current together with the currents coming from the Andes, make the Lima weather quite unpredictable as these two current provoke a thick fog at times, blocking out the sun. Most sun can be seen in the summer months, December through March, when temperatures easily go over 30 degrees and the whole of Lima goes to the beaches. Temperatures hardly go under 15 degrees, but in the winter months, July through September Lima weather can feel much colder due to the humidity. True rain one will see almost never in Lima, but some drizzle does happen at times.

2.6) Things to do in Lima

The City of Kings; Lima's old nickname stemming from centuries ago may not be at place in the same way it was before, but nevertheless once you get to know this city you will feel that the nickname hasn't been lost completely. Being a large South American capital of a very diverse country, it is obvious that Lima is full of things to do and see. In general one can even say that Lima is an undervalued travel destination and see only as a stopover for people coming to Peru. Hopefully the following lines will make you interested in discovering this amazing, sometimes chaotic city full of history. Following are a couple of lines about the most famous Lima sightseeing places. Don't take this list as a complete list but as an impression of all the things to do in Lima;

City centre

A visit to Lima is never complete without a visit to the city centre; this large commercial and political neighborhood is the historic hart of the city and home to many of the ministries, political offices, the palace of Justice and of course the municipality of Lima. Having suffered years from a bad image regarding safety, the city centre in the last couple of years has undergone a still going on transformation which has energized investment and “cleaned up” the streets. Lima centre is home to some of the most beautiful plazas in Peru and even South America. Outstanding plazas and therefore famous Lima sightseeing place are the Plaza San Martin, named after one of the liberators of Peru and especially the Plaza de Armas, with the presidential palace one side and the Cathedral build on top of an Inca Temple on the other side. The Cathedral is one of the oldest in South America but through rebuilding and reconstructions after earthquakes changed during time. The surroundings of the Plaza are nice streets full of street vendors and buildings out the colonial era. Especially pay attention to the wooden large balconies made with fine carvings. Here you will also find the Santa Domingo Church, building started under Pizarro himself and the most important feature of the church are the tombs. On the other side of the river Rimac, dividing the centre and the next neighborhood Rimac, you can also find one of the oldest bullfight rings on the continent. Close to the national stadium you can find one of the new things to do in Lima; el Parque de Agua, the water fountain park. This park has a amazing collection of fountains, sprays and what have you not where you can walk and run through. Especially after sunset this is a spectacle for the eye as the whole park is decorated with colorful lights, giving the water an even more fascinating aspect.

Miraflores

Further south you come to the commercial district of Lima, and maybe one of the most famous; Miraflores. With most hotels being located around this area, together with good restaurants and nightlife, it is more than likely that your hotel will be located in this neighborhood. Here you will find Parque Kenneday, the commercial heart of Miraflores, just a few blocks from the coast with nice boardwalks and parks, the most famous the Parque de Amor (The park of Love). You will also find Larco Mar here; one of the many shopping’s Lima has to offer. This mall has plenty of good restaurants with amazing views over the ocean below. The Lima coast is mainly a rock coast, having the beaches down at the water meanwhile the city starts on top of the cliffs behind the beach. This makes that the beaches are reached either by car or on foot by one of the stairways. The down coast, called Costa Verde is recently been renovaded and the beaches are attracting people again. Here you can find also one of the most famous seafood restaurants in Peru; The Rosa Nautica. During the day the water is full of surfers waiting for the right wave. This brings us to another activity within the scale of things to do in Lima; Surfing. Lima has no great large waves but does provide constantly good waves, especially for people new to the sport.

Barranco

Besides Miraflores lies the other seaside neighborhood of Barranco. This more artistic and bourgeois area is where many writers, poets and other artists live and have lived. Having a very nice main plaza and streets with palm trees and plants, this area also provides you with one of the nicest sunsets you may see in Peru.

San Isidro

When going from Lima city centre to the neighborhoods located at the ocean, you will pass through another large district making out the Lima Skyline. This area called San Isidro is the financial heart of Lima, and hence Peru. This is where the banks have their headquarters, investment firms and international headquarters can all be found here. A lot of countries have their embassies also in this area.

Besides all this, Lima has so much more to offer; pre Colombian ruins, Inca sites, great shopping, great Lima restaurants and of course the number of Lima museum. Most people may not have the time, but Lima will easily maintain you for days and the number of Lima sightseeing spots is endless.

2.7) Lima Gastronomy

A center of immigration and centers of the Spanish Viceroyalty, Lima has elaborated the art of incorporating unique dishes brought from the arrival of the Spanish Conquistadors and the receiving of many waves of immigrants: African, European, Chinese, and Japanese. This has strongly influenced Lima's cuisine with the incorporation of the immigrant's ingredients and cooking techniques. For this reason Lima is the culinary capital of Peru and South America. In recent years the Peruvian gastronomy, under leadership from Lima gastronomy, is living a real boost and worldwide recognition for their original look on food and the great diversity of ingredients used. Therefore it is not surprising that in Lima not a weekend goes by without the opening of a new Lima restaurant, serving a new kind of creole food mixed with foreign influences. Good food is not only restricted to the good restaurants in Lima, don't be surprised leaving a small "menu restaurant" contemplating that that was one of your best meals in times.

Creole cuisine is the most widespread in this cosmopolitan city. The only major international cuisines with a large presence are Chinese (known locally as chifa) and Italian. These, however, have been heavily modified due to a shortage or lack of authentic ingredients on one hand and to the local tastes and likes of the Peruvians on the other.

Following we will give a small over view of the favorite plates of the Limeños;

Anticuchos are brochettes made from a beef heart marinated in a various Peruvian spices and grilled, often sided with boiled potatoes and corn. They are commonly sold by street vendors.

Also frequently sold by street vendors are **tamales**: boiled corn with meat or cheese and wrapped in a banana leaf. They are similar to humitas, which consist of corn mixed with spices, sugar, onions, filled with pork and olives and finally wrapped in the leaves of corn husks.

The old time and national Peruvian dish; **Ceviche**. It consists of Andean chili peppers, onions and acidic aromatic lime, a variety brought by the Spaniards. A spicy dish, it consists generally of bite-size pieces of white fish (such as corvina or white sea bass), marinated raw in lime juice mixed with chilis.

Papa rellena (stuffed potato): mashed potatoes stuffed with ground (minced) meat, eggs, olives and various spices and then deep fried.

Pollo a la Brasa (grilled chicken or roaster chicken): is one of the most consumed foods in this country. It's basically a gutted chicken marinated in a marinade that includes various peruvian ingredients, baked on a rotating spit in wood fire oven.

Another well found famous plate; **lomo saltado**, sliced beef stir fried with onion, tomato, soy sauce, vinegar, chili and served or mixed with French fried potatoes and accompanied with rice.

Abundant in the whole of Peru but especially in Lima are the **Chifa's**. These Chinese based restaurants with Peruvian influences you can find on almost any street in Lima and are known for their cheap and large dishes. The food is oriental based but uses many Peruvian ingredients and is adjusted to the Peruvian preferences. A very popular part of Peruvian gastronomy.

Ají de gallina is a bit the Peruvian curry and consists of thin strips of chicken served with a creamy yellow and spicy sauce, made with ají amarillo. The dish is served with white rice and a hard boiled egg.

Chicharrones: a dish consisting of deep-fried and heavily salted pork. There are at least two kinds of chicharrones: fried pork or seafoods.

The abundance of products coming from this country, mixed with the exotic and local influences and cooking techniques, makes Lima indeed a culinary capital and a worthwhile place to learn something about the plates that Peruvians appreciate so much and the proud they prepare them with. For more information, check our Lima restaurant guide or look into our Lima culinary tour.

3) Cusco

3.1) Cusco General

Cusco; the Navel of the World. This is the city that the Inca's and even the Spaniards once considered the capital of Peru and even South America. Being the oldest still existing city in South America, this is obvious a centre of regional history and culture. Being still the constitutional Capital of Peru, the new city is built on the ancient Inca city, giving the city a unique combination and architectural style. You can see the typical Spanish colonial buildings and patios constructed with blocks cut by the Inca for other buildings. Most of the ancient Inca buildings do not exist anymore but the foundations which in many cases were too heavy or big for the Spaniards to destroy remain. The Spaniards also gained a fondness for the Inca style and started using some of the details in their own buildings.

The city is full of beautiful plazas and small cobblestone streets. Being a tourism centre in South America, it is also home to some of the greatest shopping for artisanal products and clothing. Being home to a large variety of tourists, Cusco also offers the benefits of a tourist city, good restaurants and great nightlife.

Furthermore, besides all the beauty and dun Cusco itself has to offer the region is equally rich of things to see and do. Hiking, rafting, mountain biking and visiting all the ancient sites nearby; Pisac, Ollantaytambo and of course Machu Picchu, all this can be done based in Cusco.

Being such a diverse city, Cusco of course invites to staying an additional day and enjoy the great shopping the city has to offer. Typical Andean weaving, pottery and jewellery, it can all be found here on one street. A city like this would not be complete with a decent offer of nice and special hotels. The Monasterio Hotel in Cusco, probably the best known 5* hotel of the country after the Sanctuary Lodge at the site of Machu Picchu, is built in an ancient monastery in the city centre. Another very highly recommended 5* hotel is La Casona by Inkaterra. Other great hotels & Spas can be found in the Sacred Valley. Surrounded by the beautiful and tranquil environment of this valley with its mild climate, you will find some of the best hotels in Peru and even South America at only an hour drive from the imperial city Cusco.

Being such a travelled city, obviously Cusco is one of the major transport hubs of the region, having good road, rail and air connection with Lima, Arequipa, Puno and La Paz.

3.2) Cuzco history

The city of Cuzco (Cusco) as we know it today was initially started its construction by the Inca around 1300 but proof has been found of another civilization; The Killke. Traces of this ancient part of Cuzco history have been found around the site of Sacsayhuaman.

Nevertheless the Cuzco history received its first big impulse under the Inca rule. According to the myth this is where Manco Inca set his staff in the ground and decided to build the Inca capital. The city was constructed in the form of a puma, with Sacsayhuaman as head of the Puma and the main square as the heart. The city had two sectors: the urin and hanan.

Each was further divided to encompass two of the four provinces, Chinchasuyu (NW), Antisuyu (NE), Qontisuyu (SW) and Collasuyu (SE). A road led from each of these quarters to the corresponding quarter of the empire.

The city was further built and developed by Pachacutec, the great Inca warrior, the man who transformed the Kingdom of Cuzco from a sleepy city-state into the vast empire of Tahuantinsuyu.

The city fell as a consequence of the division of the empire after the death of Huayna Capac in 1527. It was captured by the generals of Atahualpa, one of the two sons who divided the Inca Empire. Nineteen months later, Spanish explorers invaded the city, taking advantage of this city weakened by internal struggle.

The first Spaniards arrived in the city on 15 November 1533. Francisco Pizarro officially arrived in Cuzco on 23 March 1534, renaming it the "Very noble and great city of Cuzco". The many buildings constructed after the Hispanic invasion have a mixture of Spanish influence with Inca indigenous architecture, including the Santa Clara and San Blas neighborhoods. The Spanish destroyed many Inca buildings, temples and palaces. They used the remaining walls as bases for the construction of a new city. Cuzco stands on layers of cultures, with the old Tawantinsuyu built on Killke structures, and the Spanish having replaced indigenous temples with Catholic churches, and palaces with mansions for the invaders. The Cuzco history is literally built on top of each other.

Cuzco was the center for the Spanish colonization and spread of Christianity in the Andean world. It became very prosperous thanks to agriculture and mining, as well as the trade with Spain. The Spanish colonists constructed many churches and convents, as well as a cathedral, university and Archbishopric.

Having suffered from earthquakes throughout the entire Cuzco history, a major earthquake on 21 May 1950 caused severe damage in Cuzco. The Dominican Priory and Church of Santo Domingo, which were built on top of the impressive Qoricancha (Temple of the Sun), were among the colonial era buildings affected. The city's Inca architecture, however, withstood the earthquake. Many of the old Inca walls were at first thought to have been lost after the earthquake, but the granite retaining walls of the Qoricancha were exposed, as well as those of other ancient structures throughout the city.

After Peru declared its independence in 1821, Cuzco maintained its importance within the administrative structure of the country. Upon independence, the government created the Department of Cuzco, maintaining authority over territory extending to the Brazilian border. Cuzco was made capital of the department; subsequently it became the most important city in the south-eastern Andean region.

Since the 1990s, tourism increased, and the hotel sector subsequently expanded. Currently, Cuzco is the most important tourist destination in Peru. The city's urban sprawl is still expanding, having extended to the San Sebastian and San Jerónimo districts. As you can read, Cuzco history is as rich as many of the ancient cities in the world. The birthplace of several cultures and ground for several culture clashes; this is what makes Cuzco the special city it is.

3.3) Cuzco Museums

Surprisingly for being a city with such history and cultural background, the city does not possess a large number of museums. The reason for this is partially the fact that Cuzco was robbed from many of its mayor artifacts throughout the centuries and many of the most important pieces that did service are now in Lima or foreign museums. The few Cuzco Museums that are present two are worthwhile mentioning; **The Museum of Pre Colombian Art** and the **Museum of Qoricancha**. There are other smaller Cuzco Museums such as the chocolate museum but we will focus on the larger historical Cuzco Museums.

Museum of Pre Colombian Art;

This is probably the most famous of all Cuzco museums; this art museum is dedicated to the display of archaeological artifacts and examples of pre-Columbian artworks drawn from all regions of pre-Columbian Peru. The museum is situated on **Plaza Nazarenas** in Cusco's San Blas district, and has on permanent display exhibitions of some 450 individual representative artifacts that are drawn from the wider collection of its parent museum, the **Larco Museum** in the Peruvian capital Lima.

The Museum of the Site of Qoricancha;

This underground archaeological museum contains numerous interesting pieces, including mummies, textiles and sacred idols from the site.

3.4) Cusco Weather

The Cusco weather is mainly dominated by the influence of the Andean highlands climate. The Cusco weather is officially known as a subtropical highland climate. Its climate is generally dry and temperate, with two defined seasons. The dry season lasts from April through mid November, with abundant sunshine, and occasional nighttime freezes: July is the coolest month with an average of 9.6 °C. The wet season lasts from end November to end March, with night frost less common and the Cusco weather in general warmer: November averages 13.4 °C. Although frost and hail are common, snow is virtually unheard of. In the months July and August, strong winds can sometimes set up during the day, making the Cusco weather somewhat chillier at times. In general one can say that for most of the year the Cusco weather is quite agreeable, especially during the day when you have a blue sky with plenty of strong sun and maybe some distant clouds between the mountains.

3.5) Cuzco geography

The Cuzco geography is dominated by its location in a valley between mountains reaching 4000 meters. Cuzco itself is located at approximately 3300 meters and hence the altitude makes itself feel in the fact that one may suffer from some altitude sickness. Apart from some shortness of breath, symptoms can be, minor headaches, lack of hunger and even some insomnia. The best remedy is to take it easy the first day of so, drink lots of water and eat light. The local remedy is Mate de Coca, tea made with dried coca leaves. These leaves are a big part of the Peruvian and Bolivian Andean culture.

North the Cuzco geography is marked by the range of the Cordillera Vilcabamba. The highest peak is Nevado Ausangate (6493 m) located south of Cusco. On a clear day the majestic flanks of this “Apu” or sacred mountain can be seen from the higher points in Cuzco. Within the valley itself, the Cuzco geography has several smaller mountains making the valley a large stretched field with much difference in altitude. To the south the valley goes slightly downwards towards San Sebastian and San Jeronimo. From here you can continue towards Arequipa and Puno. On the north the roads go to the Sacred Valley and Abancay. Another remarkable fact of the Cuzco geography is that on top of the city, the supposed head of the Puma –the ancient layout of the city- Sacsayhuaman is located, the old fortress of Cusco and the stronghold of the city. This site is till well present, only enhanced by the neighboring presence of a large Jesus statue on the mountain besides. In the evening this brightly lit statue can be seen from all over the city.

3.6) What to do in Cusco and surroundings

When in Cusco, one will few times wonder what to do in Cusco. It will more be a case of planning and trying to do as much as possible in the limited time most visitors have. On you’re what to do in Cusco list there are of course some standard visits of places that cannot be missed when in Cusco. The list would at least hold a city tour Cusco including the following sites;

Following are the main sites you will visit on a City Tour Cusco;

The Plaza de Armas; Cusco’s beautiful main square surrounded by colonial buildings and galleries and flanked on one side by the Cusco Cathedral and on the other by the Church of La Compañía.

Qoricancha or the Temple of the Sun; this large site used to be the most important temple in the Inca era. A religious centre the site was completely dedicated to the Sun and the Moon, the main Inca gods. The temple was, according to writings left behind by the Conquistadores, covered with gold leaf and held some of the most impressive artifacts the Conquistadores came across. It was also one of the first buildings to be torn down by the Spaniards, making a statement by putting a large Convent on top of the Inca Site. Nowadays, the site is an interesting mixture of these two styles clashing in this convent. Most of the Inca chambers are so huge that the Spanish were not able of deconstructing them and therefore incorporated them into the new structure.

Sacsayhuaman; Or Sexy Woman as many tourists find it easier to pronounce, is probably the oldest constructed place around Cusco. Traces have been found of the Killke civilization having constructed buildings here and with the arrival of the Inca in the 1300’s the site was elaborated and taken to another level. Huge stones, some of the biggest registered in the Inca Empire can be found here. The site used to be a military camp and training ground under Inca reign and served as the main point of defense for the city. Two large towers used to stand on these hills and some of the fiercest battles with the Spaniards were fought here. After the conquest, the Spaniards used the smaller blocks of granite of this site to construct several colonial buildings such as the Cathedral.

Other smaller but very interesting sites you will visit on a City tour Cusco are located at about 15 minutes’ drive from Cusco and are Qenqo, a small site supposed to be used as a solar center for investigation, Puka Pukara, a hunting base used as a travelers hut, and Tambomachay, a site dedicated to water.

Other places you cannot miss when doing a city tour Cusco;

Calle Hatun Rumiyuq or the street of the Twelve Angled Stone; probably one of the most visited streets in Cusco the street has a beautiful example of two Inca building styles. One side with small stones more or less cubicles stacked on each other without mortar and on the other the impressive huge granite stones in strange shapes completely matched together like a large puzzle. It is in this wall that you can find the Twelve Angled Stone, a masterpiece of Inca masonry. On top of this wall is the original Archbishop's Palace, now a museum of art mainly focused on the Cusco School.

Barrio de San Blas; Going uphill (in the first days in Cusco this may be quite the task) from the Twelve Angled Stone, you reach to a very steep street taking you to San Blas. This city centre colonial neighborhood is included in the standard city tour Cusco and is best visited on your own account. Here you can find the heart of artisan and craft houses in Cusco. The streets are for a large not accessible to traffic and since the neighborhood is built against one of the flanks of the valley, you will have to the necessary steps to get to know this area. The views from this part of town are also worthwhile and having a coffee on the upper part of San Blas Square is where you really feel on holiday. On the Plaza San Blas you will also find a small charge. The charge itself is maybe not the most interesting one but inside you can find one of the most beautiful wood carving pieces you can find. A whole preaching chair made out of a single log of wood.

The Sacred Valley of the Inca's; this valley, located at about an hour drive from Cusco is also one of the mayor things that will figure on the -what to do in Cusco list- of many people. The Sacred Valley used to be the main source of food products for the Cusco area. Located at about 800 meters lower than Cusco, the Sacred Valley enjoys a micro climate, much milder than that of Cusco. The relatively broad valley is crossed by the Urubamba (also known as the Vilcanote River) River, making these lands very fertile. Besides the cultivated flats, many of the mountain flanks in this valley were constructed with terracing to create even more agricultural spaces in this valley. On the beginning and end of this valley you can find two large fortresses for the protection of this important valley. The ruins of Pisac, as many Inca citadels, is built on top of a strategically located mountain and surrounded by Andean terracing, is obviously a place of importance for the protection of this area. On the other end of the valley, in Ollantaytambo you can find the impressive steep ruins of Ollantaytambo. These ruins are not only protecting the Sacred Valley but also the access to Machu Picchu. It is here that the Spanish have suffered one of the biggest defeats by the Inca in a ferocious battle where the Inca, supported by the Indian from lower lands, outsmarted the Spanish in one famous occasion. The town of Ollantaytambo is also one of the few examples of the urban layout of Inca towns. Constructed in several large blocks with the houses and entrances towards the inner patio, this is a typical Inca construction type. Especially the houses and streets on the right side of the ruins are very interesting to walk through. Here in Ollantaytambo (maybe to mark the importance of this city in Inca time) you can find the last train station to Aguas Calientes and Machu Picchu.

Besides all these sites Cusco is also a center for luxury travel. Being provided with some of the best hotels in Peru, Cusco and the Sacred Valley will not disappoint the traveler looking for some more luxury and good Spa's and restaurants.

For the more adventure buffs, the what to do in Cusco and surrounding list will of course have one or more of the many outdoor activities this region has to offer.

Hike to some of the lesser known Inca sites in the region; Choquequirao or Espiritu Pampa. Choquequirao, meaning the Cradle of Gold is a lesser known large site connected with Machu Picchu through the typical Inca paths. The site can be reached through a 4 day trek starting and ending in Cusco. For combining this site with Machu Picchu allow at least a week.

Espiritu Pampa is the last resort of the Incas and the place from where they organized their rebellion against the Spanish conquistadores. The site was discovered by Hiram Bingham but discarded as not being important. In later excursions the site was valued for its importance and size. This site can only be reached by an at least 6 or 7 day hike.

3.7) Cusco Gastronomy

Being the centre of the Inca civilization, a civilization built on agricultural accomplishments, Cusco was also the centre of this agricultural development. The Andean crops, especially corn and potatoes have always had a special significance in this region and as the bases of many plates. It is estimated that in Peru exist about 2000 types of potatoes. Common meats for the highlands are pork, alpaca and the Andean delicacy **guinea pig**. In Cusco a new type of fusion kitchen has been created mixing typical Andean plates with more coastal dishes. Some of the more famous highland plates are **chicharrones** (fried pork), **lomo saltado** (beef in a soya sauce), **anticuchos** (kebabs mostly from beef heart) and the dish one can get on every street corner **choclo con queso**, corn with cheese.

Cusco is as a mayor tourist destination of course also home to the necessary good restaurants and bars. Some nice restaurants can be found on the **Plaza de Armas** and other in the alleys in the upper centre and San Blas. **Cusco nightlife** is also famous in Peru. Being a city with a quite metropolitan feel to it, many travelers looking for diversion, Cusco has plenty to offer. Bars with live music, discotheques, Irish pubs, you name, from Monday to Sunday, you will always find a place to go.

4) Machu Picchu

4.1) Machu Picchu General

Machu Picchu, probably one of the more enigmatic places of South America and hence one of the biggest attractions this continent has to offer. One of the New 7 World Wonders, this is Peru's proud and a marvel to see.

Facts about Machu Picchu;

Some interesting facts about Machu Picchu and its discoverer; Machu Picchu officially was discovered in 1911 by Hiram Bingham, a Yale professor responsible for several excursions and discoveries in mainly Peru. However there are dozens of testimonials of people having been to Machu Picchu going back as far as 1847. Hiram Bingham was for sure the first to excavate and document Machu Picchu in detail.

Some other facts about Machu Picchu; Machu Picchu is the most visited attraction in South America welcoming over one million visitors a year. Machu Picchu is located at lower altitude than Cusco and hence has a milder climate. Machu Picchu is located in a national park known apart from Machu Picchu for the large number of bird species living in this area.

Other facts about Machu Picchu worth mentioning is the fact that Machu Picchu is a site that can be visited in a very nice and luxurious way, taking the Hiram Bingham Luxurious train, stay in one of the great luxury hotels in Aguas Calientes such as the Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel or the Sumaq Hotel. Or even stay at the site itself in the luxurious Sanctuary Lodge, giving you views of the site from your hotel. On the other end, hiking and camping on the famous Inca Trail and arrive at the site through the famous Sun Gate.

Of course we could continue with writing more and more facts about Machu Picchu, this wonderful and amazing place, which is subject to the imagination of so many people and still holds so many mysteries, but it would be better for you to come and discover this awesome site on this awesome location yourself.

4.2) Machu Picchu History

The site of Machu Picchu was constructed around 1450 and abandoned about a hundred years later. The site itself, in contrast to other (smaller) sites, was never discovered by the Spanish and hence a huge source of information about the Inca civilization.

The known Machu Picchu history starts with the discovery of Machu Picchu by Hiram Bingham, the American Yale professor leading several expeditions deep into the Inca heartland. Hiram Bingham arrived at Machu Picchu in 1911 in search for the Lost City of the Incas, the place where the last Inca retreated. This place got known by the testimonies left behind by the rebel Incas captured by the Spanish conquistadores who led a ferocious guerrilla resistance in the first decades of the conquest. These were led from the so-called Lost City of the Incas.

This is and was a mythic place as the Spaniards and so many after them looked for this city who supposedly (in accordance with the findings at other sites) held great quantities of gold and even became known as “El Dorado”, The Golden. Nowadays with quite some certainty we know that the last refuge of the Inca’s is located in the Vilcabamba area, a site called Espiritu Pampa. Ironically Hiram Bingham discovered this site before he discovered Machu Picchu and discarded it as being the last stronghold of the Inca. On a second expedition in 1911, Bingham came back and with the help of a local historicist from Cusco and a local farmer living in what is now known as the Santa Teresa Area, he located Machu Picchu. Due to its location against the side of a mountain, Bingham immediately valued the sheer size of the site. With small efforts of excavations and freeing the site of the overgrowing jungle, he got more and more convinced that this was the “Lost City of the Inca’s”.

The discovery was immediately world news and National Geographic magazine wrote a large article about it and declared it one of the most important discoveries of the century. The theory that this was the last refuge of the Inca’s did hold up for some years until more and more discoveries were made and Espiritu Pampa was valued for its importance.

Machu Picchu history was born and the site became more and more famous up to the point of today, being one of the most historical sites of South America. After Hiram Bingham, many archeologists came to the site and made more and more discoveries, reconstructing the history of Machu Picchu as far as possible.

The reason for Machu Picchu is still one of the most debated topics when it deals about its historic importance. The main theories are that it was a royal retreat for high placed and religious leaders, that it was a centre for agricultural testing and experimentation, and that it was a trade centre on the crossing of several Inca pathways and controlling a large part of the economic production from this part of the Inca Empire. For all we know it could have been all three of these functions together as there have been found evidence to support all of these theories. Seeing the location of the site and the effort that went in constructing such a citadel on such an amazing place, it must have served a high purpose in the Inca society. One thing most scholars do agree on is the fact that the site was never discovered and abandoned more or less around the time the Spaniards arrived in the Cusco area. One theory says that the population died of a smallpox epidemic brought over by people who have been in contact with the Spaniards in Cusco or other areas. Some bodies were found in Machu Picchu some mummified. Nevertheless the number of bodies found was quite small compared with the sheer size of the site. This helps the theory that the site was abandoned for serious reasons. The most serious reasons at this time looking at the Machu Picchu history would have to do with the Spaniards arriving to their land. The threat of soon to be discovered by the plundering Spaniards together with the fact of being confronted with new illnesses, makes up for the most probable reason that this site was abandoned.

When Hiram Bingham rediscovered the site, he started large excavations and clearing work. He found a great quantity of pottery, tools and even some mummies. Nevertheless the quantity was not that big as one would expect from a site of this size. This maintains the theory that the site was discovered and even partially plundered before the arrival of Hiram Bingham. The majority of the items found during the excavations led by Hiram Bingham and the Yale University, ended up in boxes in the Yale University for decades.

After long law suits, the Peruvian Government got their justice and an agreement with Yale was signed to return the artifacts to Peru. This year the first 30 (!!) boxes of artifacts arrived in Peru.

4.3) Machu Picchu Museum

Maybe the best Machu Picchu museums can probably be found in Lima and Cusco. In Lima strongly recommended is the Museo Arqueológico Rafael Larco Herrera followed by The Museo Nacional de Arqueología Antropología e Historia del Perú. Other Museum dealing with the Inca Culture is the The Gold Museum. In Cusco your best bet would be the Museo de Arte Precolombino.

However the official Machu Picchu Museum is the Museo de Sitio Manuel Chávez Ballón, this Machu Picchu museum tries to achieve the preservation and dissemination of cultural and archaeological research.

The Machu Picchu museum is organized in seven phases. In these seven phases, they emphasize the beauty and historical significance of the large collection of artifacts, construction tools (copper and bronze), pins, mirrors, tweezers and needles. The exhibit shows in detail the metallurgical expertise in the Inca city; the spectacular examples of dexterity in stone quarrying, as well as significant objects in various other materials. These displays express to the world, a view of the sustenance of life in Inca Machu Picchu, the strategic administrative center intertwined between the Amazon and the Andes.

The multimedia displays information, photos, live and textual details were organized to offer visitors a full image of the significance of Machu Picchu, and the Cultural and Natural World Heritage Site, also a botanical garden with flora of Machu Picchu area as orchids.

The Machu Picchu Museum is located at 1.7 kilometers from Aguas Calientes. The museum is located at the base of the mountain of Machu Picchu. It is reached by passing the bridge across the Urubamba River in path-route to Inca city of Machu Picchu, as it diverts to the west (toward right).

The Machu Picchu Museum presents a collection of 250 original objects between stone, metal, ceramic, bone and others; a result of archaeological research in the recent decades in the Inca City of Machu Picchu and the Inca Trail.

4.4) Machu Picchu Weather

Located at about 1000 meters lower than Cusco and getting closer the Amazon Rainforest just 100 kilometers away, the weather in Machu Picchu is very unpredictable. Having some of the effects of the highlands and some effects of the Amazon basin below, it is mild climate in temperatures but can very humid at times. The Machu Picchu weather is dominated by the cloud formation caused by the shock between the highland colder winds and the humidity coming from the tropical jungle area. This makes that the Machu Picchu weather suffers from a lot of cloud forming at times even blocking out the whole site. It can also give Machu Picchu an even more mysterious feel when the clouds move slowly over the ridges of the impressive site.

The weather in Machu Picchu can therefore change rapidly as well with bright days in the morning with hardly a cloud on the sky and temperatures well into 20°C. and in the afternoon clouds come setting in and temperatures fall and winds pick up.

In general the weather in Machu Picchu knows two seasons; the wet and the dry season. The winter time is when there is more rain in the area. These are the months December through March. In February the INC, the National Cultural Institute, closes down the Inca Trail as well for being too dangerous and to use the time to do maintenance and cleaning operations. The dry season would be from April to November, but especially in the beginning and end you can never exclude some rain in the evening and even during the day. Normally the weather in Machu Picchu is clearest in the months June, July and August. Nevertheless the weather in Machu Picchu does definitely contribute to the magic and beauty of this amazing site.

4.5) Machu Picchu geography

Probably one of the main reasons why Machu Picchu is such an amazing place is its location. Looking at the map of Machu Picchu, you can see that it is located directly on a mountain ridge between two other mountains. Both sides of the mountain have sheer drops and end in the Vilcanote river (at some points also called the Urubamba River). Machu Picchu means old mountain in the Quechua language and is located on the Vilcanota mountain range, part of the Andes mountain range. The Machu Picchu Geography provides a shelter to a variety of flora and fauna. Plants like alisos, puya palm trees, and ferns are found in addition to more than 90 kinds of orchids. Animal life includes spectacled bear (the only native bear in South America), cock-of-the-rocks or "tunqui", tankas, wildcats and colorful variety of butterflies and insects. The site is part of a national park and the national park is famous for its large number of birds, especially the hummingbird population is quite impressive.

The site itself is located at approximately 2500 meters above sea level. The ancient city lies about 80 kilometers from Cusco. The ancient city is situated in a saddle between two mountains important to Inca culture. While the other mountain was already named Machu Picchu, Huayna Picchu, which means Young Mountain, is the other peak that nestles the ancient monument. Machu Picchu geography does nevertheless provide us with evidence that it was a very important site for the Inca's.

The Machu Picchu geography made it that it had a reliable water supply thanks to the ice fed rivers that flow along the Andes and enough level land for agriculture. Terraced hillsides added to the total amount of arable land and at same time made the slopes harder to ascend if ever invaders chose that path. Machu Picchu was a veritable fortress with easily defensible entrances. One entrance was the Sun Gate which traverses the mountains and leads to Cusco, the other was the Inca bridge.

4.6) Machu Picchu Things to see

Machu Picchu is one the biggest attractions in Peru, and not surprisingly. Located on a steep mountain ridge surrounded by lush green mountains and snowcapped peaks in the distance, this is a site that was built to impress and hence holds several of the biggest attractions in Peru. Machu Picchu information and knowledge has been gathered throughout the years by hundreds of archeologists and still much of the Machu Picchu information is incomplete or unsure at the least. This is why to discover and hike Machu Picchu feels like actually discovering the site. As the Machu Picchu information is still somewhat incomplete you can contemplate about the significance, the whether or not a certain stone or detail was intentional or not, and all the questions this site asks its visitors to think about.

Following we will give you a quick overview of the Machu Picchu information and places within the site you would want to visit on a one or two day Machu Picchu visit.

Hike Machu Picchu;

Not only is the site itself is declared UNESCO patrimony, one of the ways to get there as well. Hiking Machu Picchu via the famous Inca Trail is probably the most impressive way to get to Machu Picchu. This hike will help you appreciate the highly elaborated Inca culture not only by one of its most famous constructions, but also by seeing the maze of Inca highways they build to maintain such a vast empire. The regular Inca Trail takes 4 days to complete and takes you over mountain passes and highlands to lower altitudes and warmer climate as you arrive to Machu Picchu. On route you will see some other fascinating Inca sites such as Llactapata, Runkurakay, Sayacmarca, Phuyupatamarca and Wiñay Wayna. On the fourth day you will get up really early to do the last kilometers and arrive at Machu Picchu at sunrise. The way you enter the site is the way many Incas did; through the Sungate and by the Guardhouse. From here the sight of Machu Picchu is unforgettable and with a bit of goodwill from the sun, maybe one of the most impressive sites you'll see. Another option is the 2 day Inca Trail, this shorter version takes you over the last part of the official Inca Trail and also grant you the honor to enter this city through the Sungate. Of course the Inca Trail is one of the major attractions in Peru and as there is a limited number of 500 people daily, often sold out. But this is no reason to worry; there are two alternative ways to hike Machu Picchu.

The 4 day Lares trek takes you from the Thermal Baths of Lares just outside of the Sacred Valley over mountain passes and plains, visiting some authentic Quechua villages on the way, to Ollantaytambo, from where you will take the train to Aguas Calientes.

The 5 day Salkantay Trek is a highland trek giving you the opportunity to get to know one of the "Apu's" of the region; Sacred Mountains. This hike takes you over some high passes and shows you the change in climate and vegetation when rising to almost 5000 meter of altitude before reaching Ollantaytambo to take the train to Machu Picchu.

Sun Gate

As mentioned above, the Sun Gate is where the famous Inca trail ends and goes up into the site of Machu Picchu. Here there is a gateway constructed which one can see as the official entrance gate of the site. In ancient times the gate was probably guarded and maybe even in charge of denying people access to this sacred place. The visitors not doing the Inca Trail are also free to go to the Sun Gate. This is definitely recommended as some of the most beautiful pictures from Machu Picchu can be taken from this angle. The Guardhouse can also be found in this region of the site.

Huayna Picchu

Probably the opposite point from the Sun Gate is Huayna Picchu, or Young Mountain. This impressive mountain stands out for its steep slopes covered in green. The mountain can be climbed via a small and steep path that gives you altitude over the site below. Once you reach the top you can see Machu Picchu way below and get the true impact of what an amazing place the Incas choose to construct their citadel. On Huayna Picchu itself there are other buildings erected and artificial caves dug out of big rocks.

Sectors and architecture of the site;

The site of Machu Picchu is divided into two main sections known as the Urban and Agricultural Sectors, divided by a wall. The Agricultural Sector is further subdivided into Upper and Lower sectors, while the Urban Sector is split into East and West sectors, separated by wide plazas.

The central buildings of Machu Picchu use the classical Inca architectural style of polished dry-stone walls of regular shape. Many junctions in the central city are so perfect that it is said not even a blade of grass fits between the stones.

Some Inca buildings were constructed using mortar, but by Inca standards this was quick, shoddy construction, and was not used in the building of important structures. Peru is a highly seismic land, and mortar-free construction was more earthquake-resistant than using mortar. The stones of the dry-stone walls built by the Incas can move slightly and resettle without the walls collapsing.

Inca walls had numerous design details that helped protect them against collapsing in an earthquake. Doors and windows are trapezoidal and tilt inward from bottom to top; corners usually are rounded; inside corners often incline slightly into the rooms; and "L"-shaped blocks often were used to tie outside corners of the structure together. These walls do not rise straight from bottom to top but are offset slightly from row to row. How they moved and placed the enormous blocks of stones remains a mystery, although the general belief is that they used hundreds of men to push the stones up inclined planes. A few of the stones still have knobs on them that could have been used to lever them into position; it is believed that after the stones were placed, the Incas would have sanded the knobs away, but a few were overlooked.

The space is composed of 140 structures or features, including temples, sanctuaries, parks, and residences that include houses with thatched roofs. There are more than one hundred flights of stone steps –often completely carved from a single block of granite –and numerous water fountains. These were interconnected by channels and water-drains perforated in the rock that were designed for the original irrigation system. Evidence suggests that the irrigation system was used to carry water from a holy spring to each of the houses in turn.

According to archaeologists, the urban sector of Machu Picchu was divided into three great districts: the Sacred District, the Popular District to the south, and the District of the Priests and the Nobility.

Located in the first zone are the primary archaeological treasures: the Intihuatana, the Temple of the Sun and the Room of the Three Windows. These were dedicated to Inti, their sun god and greatest deity. The Popular District, or Residential District, is the place where the lower-class people lived. It includes storage buildings and simple houses.

The royalty area, a sector for the nobility, is a group of houses located in rows over a slope; the residence of the Amautas (wise persons) was characterized by its reddish walls, and the zone of the Ñustas (princesses) had trapezoid-shaped rooms. The Monumental Mausoleum is a carved statue with vaulted interior and carved drawings.

The Guardhouse is a three-sided building, with one of its long sides opening onto the Terrace of the Ceremonial Rock. The three-sided style of Inca architecture is known as the wayrona style.

5) Sacred Valley of the Incas

5.1) Sacred Valley of the Incas General

The Sacred Valley located at about an hour drive from Cusco is the cradle of much of the agricultural wealth the Inca's enjoyed. This large valley, crossed by the Urubamba or Vilcanote River is about 100km long and at some points 3km wide. It is known for its large plains on the banks of the river, providing very fertile land for agriculture. The valley floods every year, washing away the old sedation and leaving behind new and more fertile soil. The Sacred Valley Cusco is located on a lower altitude than Cusco, making the climate milder and the valley walls create some kind of micro climate, of great value to the farmers who lived and are living in this valley. The mountain sides are scattered with Inca Terracing, used even today. These would provide the Incas with crops during the rainy season, when the valley got flooded for a large part. Being such an important place for the Inca, it is no wonder that one can find several impressive ruins and Inca constructions along the whole length of the valley. The last town in the Sacred Valley Cusco is also the "gate" to Machu Picchu. This was so in ancient times with the beginning of the Inca Trail located here and even now with one of the main train stations to Machu Picchu Ollantaytambo located in the village with the same name.

The Sacred Valley Cusco is also a retreat for many people from the sometimes cold climate of Cusco. Located at about 2800 meters, the valley has beautiful days and nights that are much milder. This is one of the reason why many visitors decide to spend most nights in the Sacred Valley and from here visit Cusco and the region. The Sacred Valley therefore holds some of the nicest hotels in Peru. Hotels like the Aranwa Boutique, the Sol y Luna and the Casa Andina Private Collection in the Sacred Valley are beautiful located and enjoy a tranquility found in few places. Many of these hotels also have Spa's and Healthcare centers.

5.2) Sacred Valley of the Incas History

The known Sacred Valley history is more or less limited to the start of the Inc civilization until the day of today. The area must have been populated by earlier societies, as proven by founds in the ruins of Sacsayhuaman near Cusco and only 35km away from the Sacred Valley. For the Inca however, the Sacred Valley actually was a sacred place and probably responsible for a large part of the agriculture and therefore food for the Cusco region, the capital in the Inca Inca Empire. The Urubamaba (Vilcanote) River runs through the valley as a snake and leaves behind fertile segmentation ideal for agriculture. The Inca soon found this out and started growing extensively corn and potatoes in the valley. Soon the acres at the rive were not sufficient anymore so the Inca started to build their famous terracing you can find all over the valley.

Being such an important area for the Inca it is no wonder that it had to be protected and maintained under control. This is probably one of the reasons why one can find some of other impressive ruins out of the time of the Inca. The ruins of Pisac are located at the entrance of the Sacred Valley (where the name of the Vilcanote River changes to Urubamba River) and on the other end, at the start of the Inca Trail (and nowadays the last train station) to Machu Picchu, you can find the ruins of Ollantaytambo. Both ruins are quite extensive and interesting. Located on high hills, providing good views of the surrounding valley, these are quite the sight to see.

The ruins of Pisac most likely had a very important agricultural function based on the number of terracing found and the fact that the town up to the day of today has one of the larger farmers markets in the area. Nevertheless, based on some of the amazing buildings in the main ruins, it cannot be discarded that the ruins did have a ceremonial and religious function.

On the other side some of the valley, some 50 Km away lays the small Inca town of Ollantaytambo. This town is known for its impressive ruins one can already see from the main road about 10 minutes away. The ruins are made up out a large plain followed by some steep large steps constructed against the mountain slopes. Besides the steps there is large terracing constructed all along the curve of the mountain, here and there supporting large store houses. On top of the hill you can find a flat part with some typical Inca walls.

The most impressive part of the ruins and the main reason why investigators think that this site was still under construction and had a special value in the Inca society are the 6 gigantic monoliths that appear to have been glued together. These probably had a religious value and worked with sun in one or another way.

Recently there have been found more and more discoveries supporting this hypothesis; behind the ruins for example one can find two triangle fields that are dug out deeper than the surrounding areas and that are located exactly where the sun shines through on the summer and winter solstice. On the road behind the ruins one can also find “sleeping stones”. These are large stones that were semi processed to be used in the Ollantaytambo structure. These stones were being transported when, most likely, the Spanish arrived and construction was brutally put to a hold.

Ollanta (as Ollantaytambo is known by locals), is one of the few towns that maintained their Inca structure, with as main characteristic the multifamily houses. These houses built in squares, would hold several families housed around their own in-house patio. The streets are narrow walkways with mostly only one entrance per square. Based on joining of two valleys, the town has little flat area to one side and other Inca ruins and store houses can be found on the other side of the town across of the main ruins. (From here you have a great view on the ruins in the late afternoon). It is because of these geographical characteristics that Ollantaytambo history received its place in Spanish history books.

It was here in Ollantaytambo that the Spanish suffered one of their worst defeats in a battle with the Inca. In 1536 when the Spanish had Cusco more or less under control, they came heading down the Sacred Valley and arrived at Ollantaytambo, only to be awaited by hundreds of Inca accompanied by several tribes from lower jungle areas that by now had come to help the Inca looking at the threat the Spanish posed. The Spanish arrived with several hundred soldiers, many on horses and in heavy armor, something never seen by many Inca, to the plain of Mascabamba located at the foot of the town. The Inca however were expecting them and the jungle tribes that came to help provided the Spanish with a horrific sight when they arrived in Ollantaytambo. Armed with rocks spears and arrows the Inca together with the jungle tribes were able to hold back the Spanish until they were able to flood a part of the valley, obliging the Spanish to retreat. This victory however did not last long. A couple of weeks later the Spanish returned, better armed than ever and managed to make the Ollantaytambo history what it is today. They conquered the town and site but never really pushed onwards from here to discover Machu Picchu.

5.3) Sacred Valley of the Incas Weather

Located on an altitude ranging from about 2900 meters to 2400 meters, the Sacred Valley Peru weather “suffers” less from extreme weather characteristics from higher altitude such as Cusco and Puno. The Sacred Valley Peru climate is mild with sunny days for most of the year. The nights can get somewhat colder but still quite mild. During the rainy season, from December through March, the Sacred Valley Peru weather can, like Cusco, receive its part of the rain. Nevertheless these showers do not last long and in between the sun will manage to peek through the clouds. Also during this time of the year the temperatures are the highest.

5.4) Sacred Valley of the Incas Geography

When looking at the Sacred Valley map, one immediately takes notice of the extremes this valley is located in. Situated at an hour drive from Cusco, or a 35 km hike, the Sacred Valley is located on a 600- 800 meters lower altitude than Cusco. Arriving from Cusco one has to cross the Altiplano of almost 4000 meters between Cusco and the Sacred Valley. From here the road goes down steeply until you reach the bottom of the valley on about 2800 meters altitude. On the other side the Vilcabamba Mountain range rises up to peaks of over 5000 meters altitude. Pisac is the highest point in the Sacred Valley at about 2900 meters altitude. From here the Valley gradually goes down to Ollantaytambo located on an altitude of about 2500 meters above sea level. Through the valley runs the Urubamaba (or Vilcanote) River, providing the valley with its fertile land it has been known for from the Inca age until the day of today.

5.5) Things to do in the Sacred Valley Cusco

Visit the ruins of Pisac and Ollantaytambo

Two of the main sites in the Sacred Valley and also one of the most popular when doing a Sacred Valley tour are the ruins of Pisac and Ollantaytambo. Both were initially outposts to protect the Sacred Valley, the main agricultural resource for the Cusco region from intruders. Later on both sites were developed into more important sites, with parts dedicated to worshipping the sun and being places where the important Inca lived. Especially Ollantaytambo, which never got finished, holds signs of being a very important site for religious and other purposes. Both sites are located on impressive sites, located on high mountains and towering above the towns that hold the names of these ruins.

Visit Maras & Moray

Sites less visited during the normal Sacred Valley tour but definitely worth the visit are the site of Maras and Moray. Moray is small farmer's village located on the plain between Cusco and the Sacred Valley. The town Moray itself, apart from being a good example of a typical highlands farmer village, does not really hold anything special. Nevertheless close to Moray one can find an amazing Inca site. The agricultural circles of Moray; these are three large circles in a geographic depression built to create different levels of altitude. The three circles all hold about five rings, all with about a meter of altitude difference. In this way the Inca created a micro climate with the lower rings providing temperatures of at some times 15° Celsius higher than the highest ring. Apart from the different altitude, the Inca also found out that they can "manipulate" crops by cultivating them one year on the lowest ring and very year rise one ring until the crop would be resistant to the climate on altitude.

Maras is located at about 5Km from Moray and is known for its salt fields. A small river with a very high level of sodium flows through this valley. The Inca dug out some small ponds holding this salt water and drying the ponds gave them large quantities of salt. Up to the day of today these fields are being used and most farmers hold about 4 or 5 ponds all producing around 200Kg of salt a month.

Visit the Pisac Market

Another of the highlights for many people when doing a Sacred Valley tour is visiting the market of Pisac. This market, one of the oldest in the Peruvian highlands, stems from the time of the Inca when people from different regions came to Pisac to trade and exchange products. Besides this mainly agricultural market, Pisac due to the fact that people here possess great weaving skills, became an important artisanal market for clothing, pottery, jewelry and Peruvian souvenirs. The official market days are on Tuesday, Thursday and Sunday. These are the days that the market receives most campesinos (farmers) selling their products. Nevertheless, nowadays the artisanal market has maybe become even more important than the agricultural market and therefore the market actually takes place every day. Note that when taking a Sacred Valley tour that the shared tour only operates on the market days.

Enjoy the great hotels and Spa's in the Valley

Being such an important tourist destination in Peru, it is no more than logical that the Sacred Valley also holds its number of great hotels and Spa's. Hotels like the Aranwa, The Casa Andina Private Collection and the Rio Sagrado easily rank among the best hotels in the country and all of these provide Spa's and complete luxury. One of the ways to enjoy a stay in one of these hotels is on the way to or from Machu Picchu. As most trains nowadays leave from station in the Sacred Valley (mainly Ollantaytambo Station), it is pleasant to combine the Sacred Valley tour with an overnight stay in one of these hotels and let yourself being pampered in complete luxury and tranquility. The next day we will pick you up from your hotel (you also save some hours of sleep this way) and drive you to the train station to catch your train to Machu Picchu. This can also be done on the way back for people who want to relax for a couple of days in a beautiful environment. Another way to incorporate a stay in one of these hotels in your Cusco stay is to arrive in Cusco and directly continue to the Sacred Valley and spend the rest of the day in the Valley in one of these hotels. Besides giving you the time to start feeling "on holiday" and relax with the facilities of these hotels, this also gives you the chance to acclimatize to the altitude more gradually than staying immediately in Cusco.

6) The Peruvian Rainforest

6.1) The Peruvian Rainforest general

The Peruvian Amazon is the area of the Amazon jungle included in the territory of Peru, from the east of the Andes to borders with Ecuador, Colombia, Brazil and Bolivia. This region comprises 60% of the country and is marked by a large degree of biodiversity. Peru contains the second most Amazon jungle after the Brazil. These are also the only two countries in the world where half of the territory is taken up by rainforests.

The Peru Rainforest, even though making up about 60% of the country, holds only about 11% of the Peruvian population. The Peru Rainforest can be largely divided into two different parts of jungle. The High jungle is located on the western slopes of the Andes mountain range and is situated on an altitude between 1000 and 2500 meters above sea level. In general the climate is hot, and gets warmer and more humid when heading down to the Low Jungle. The high jungle is characterized by cloud forests, as the name says forests in the clouds. These clouds are formed by the collision of different weather types and provide a lot of the humidity in the region. Rainfall therefore is quite voluminous and during the wet season, making many places almost unreachable by road. Besides the humidity, this also gives the forests a very mystical appearance. The wildlife in these forests is quite abundant and larger mammals do live here more than in the Low Jungle due to the less dense forests. These forests are due to the altitude differences also home to beautiful waterfalls, giving the rivers the chance to join the mighty Amazon River. The rivers running through this region also make that the region is home to fertile valleys and land. In this region and altitude most coffee in Peru is grown. This altitude is also the home of the cocalleros, the farmers growing coca leaves.

Once under 1000 meters above sea level, you have reached the true Peru Rainforest, the Amazon Basin of Peru. This is the large plain that is made out of the great number of rivers running through this area. Part of the area is swampland that floods completely in the wet season. This plain runs from the Bolivian border all the way to the Colombian border in the north. The area is very hot; with average temperatures around 30° Celsius and humidity levels hardly go under 75%. The area is famous for its wildlife, especially the amazing quantity of birds that live in this area. Other animals often seen in this region are monkeys, parrots, reptiles and amphibians. With a bit of luck you may see a crocodile here and maybe even one of the famous pink dolphins living in larger parts of the Amazon River.

In this area there are very few roads making the main mode of transport via the river. As the region is so hard to travel, it is obvious that many areas are still more or less unknown. The Peru Rainforests counts with countless tribes, some of them hardly known to the outside world. Some of these tribes still live very far in the jungle and have hardly or none contact with the world. In 2008 a new tribe for instance was detected from a plane, and it has been documented that the indigenous started attacking the plane with spears and arrows. In order to get to know this area you will have to experience the rivers and travelling them, an unforgettable experience.

When flying over the South American rainforest, it is clear that the rivers are the highways of this territory. The rivers flow through this area as snakes in this green covered vast land. All settlements therefore are located at rivers as this is for many people the only way to get in or out of the area. The biggest settlements in the Peru rainforest are Puerto Maldonado in the South, Pucallpa in central Peru, and Yurimaguas and Iquitos in the north. The last two are located at the actual Amazon River itself. The Amazon River is according some investigations the longest river in the world, it origins retraced to the Arequipa region in southern Peru. The river in Peru contributing most to the Amazon River is the Apurimac River, one of the best rivers in the world to do multi day Wild Water Rafting.

Home to many national parks and reserves, this part of the country is houses a great diversity of wildlife. Peru rainforest holds the first position worldwide when it comes to number of species of birds and third when it comes to the number of mammals. Almost 70 % of both species found in the Amazon Basin.

Therefore a complete Peru trip cannot be complete with a jungle experience in one of the many jungle lodges we can book for you. Manu, Tambopata or Iquitos, amazing places for a guaranteed amazing experience. These jungle lodges or Amazon River cruises will provide you with a great and ecological responsible experience, giving you some days to explore this amazing area and its fauna and flora.

6.2) Amazon Rainforest history

The documented Amazon Rainforest history when it goes about its people and settlements is relatively short. Due to the fact that this part of South America has always been a very isolated region due to the fact that they are cut off from the coast by the mighty Andes Mountains, and due to the dense forest inaccessible in many places. This makes that the communities in the jungle always have lived a live somewhat isolated and independent. The area has always been inhabited, not in the same levels as the coast or the sierra but proof of ancient civilizations living in this area has been recorded in several occasions. The Amazon rainforest history never has been marked by the arrival of the Spanish or Portuguese conquistadores as the South American coasts. The conquistadores have arrived into the heart of the Amazon Rainforest very few times and almost no records have been kept of early voyages into the deep jungle.

As the Conquistadores brought with them the art of documenting what they experienced, even though not always unbiased, most historic information we have now from South America is made up out the information gained from the conquistador's writings, together with archeological findings throughout the centuries. This makes that there is very few information regarding the ancient civilizations that have roamed these lands. Nevertheless, from the start of the 17th century, adventurers starting exploring the area and apart from mapping different actual civilizations, proof was and is still found that ancient and organized cultures have lived here. One of the most important discoveries in the Peru rainforest is probably the discovery of Espiritu Pampa in 1960. In 1911 Hiram Bingham, the discoverer of Machu Picchu already found the ruins but never really saw the importance of it.

Nowadays the main assumption is that Espiritu Pampa was the final refuge of the Inca's in the jungle. If the Spaniards ever reached this place is unknown, most theories assume not but this is still open to discussions. Apart from these discoveries, the Amazon Rainforest history remains limited to the modern history of this area and its settlements.

Most rainforest settlements used to be small villages made up out of the local small communities which at times had contact among them but lived very much isolated. In the 17th century when jungle cultivations became more and more popular in the international market a boom of cities started all over the Amazon rainforest, mainly concentrated at the shores of the bigger rivers in this area. Most famous in the world are of course Manaus in Brazil and Iquitos in Peru. These big cities are both living proof of the modern Amazon rainforest history. Having both experienced their first big impulse during the rubber boom in the 19th century, they started growing at rapid rates and became large contributors to the economies of both countries. When the demand for rubber fell, the Amazonians quickly transferred to another product they had in abundance; wood. This made that these cities kept growing until cities with populations of respectively one and half a million people. The lumber wood is still one of the biggest export products of the Amazon Rainforest and a real preoccupation to environmental organizations. The Amazon rainforest, being the lung of the world, is being cut down at a rapid rate mainly by illegal forestry companies.

Nowadays another big industry has found its way to the Peruvian Amazon rainforest; mining. Gold always has been a profitable commodity and since the finding of gold in many of the rivers that fill up the Amazon River, this has become a large industry in Peru. In many rivers the number of animals has drastically diminished and rivers have been polluted by heavy chemicals used to clean the gold found.

The Amazon rainforest history has always been exploited and used for mankind; nevertheless, nowadays we have reached a critical level in maintaining these ancient forests. Therefore this natural wonder, home to so many animals, plants and civilizations should be used wisely and protected for future generations. In order to get to know this great forest, please contact us to see if we can arrange you an unforgettable trip to this amazing area. We work with different lodges all over the Amazon Rainforest, all committed on preserving the fauna and flora of the area and contributing to local sustainable and ecological development.

6.3) Amazon rainforest climate

The Amazon rainforest climate on average is like that of any other typical tropical rainforest. It is hot and humid. The temperature is around 28°Celsius for the entire year which gets compounded due to the heavy humidity. There aren't many seasonal changes in the climate and the temperature too remains the same for pretty much of the year. In fact the difference between the day and night temperatures is greater than the difference between any two seasons. The weather remains the same all year long.

As for the rain, the Amazon rainforest climate is quite constant monsoon-like. Due to the large river basin and the tropical heat, the moist air near the ground is heated, causing it to rise. When it reaches the condensation point, it forms rain clouds. This process happens for all the 12 months. This type of rainfall is called convectional rainfall. It rains almost the whole year in the Amazon forest. But two seasons can be defined for the sake of clarity as the rainy season and the not-so-rainy season. In the former, the rains are about 60-180 inches while in the non-rainy seasons; the rains may be between 30-100 inches. The rains start just as suddenly as they stop. The main months of the rainy season are December through March.

Recent Changes in the Amazon Rainforest Climate

The rainfall in the Amazon region is said to be decreasing due to indiscriminate deforestation. In 2005, the Amazon forest suffered its worst drought in over 100 years raising serious environmental issues and questions about the future of the Amazon rainforest climate. If deforestation continues at the current rate, given the sensitive nature of Amazon's ecosystem, no forest will be left for the future generations. Each year, large areas of the forest are cut down increasing global warming pollution from the carbon dioxide and methane released due to the decaying and burning plants. Amazon rainforest is supposed to represent half the rainforests in the world today, so needless to say, it will be a great loss. Not only a loss of flora, but also of the numerous fauna and indigenous people native to Amazonia for so many years. Therefore visiting the Amazon Rainforest can be a great experience but should be done with keeping in mind the ecological, environmental and cultural values of these woods and hence visit them with an eye on trying to keep the environmental pressure as low as possible.

6.4) Peru Amazon Rainforest Geography

The lowland jungle (Selva Baja) is also known as Amazon rainforest or Amazon basin. This Eco region is the largest of Peru, holding almost 50% of the country's territory, on average between 50 and 1000 meters above sea level. It has very hot weather with an average temperature of 28°C, combined with a high relative humidity and high yearly rainfall. Its soils are very heterogeneous but almost all have river origins, and due to high temperatures and high rainfall they are poor soils with few nutrients. The Peru Amazon Rainforest geography is clearly marked by the powerful rivers such as the Apurimac, Mantaro, Amazon, Urubamba, Ucayali, Huallaga, Marañón, Putumayo, Yavarí, Napo, Pastaza, Madre de Dios, Manu, Purus, Yurua and rio Tigre, most of the rivers alimented by the water coming from the high Andes Mountains. The Apurimac River is the Amazon River's greatest contributor.

More to the west, the lands start rising towards the Andes and the Amazon rainforest geography changes drastically to the highland jungle (in Spanish Selva Alta). This particular part of Peru is also called Andean jungle or la ceja de la selva (The eyebrow of the jungle). This Eco region extends into the eastern foothills of the Andes, between 1000 to 2500 m above sea level. The eastern slopes of the Andes are home to a great variety of fauna and flora due to the different altitudes and climates within the region. Temperatures are warm in the lowlands and colder in higher altitudes. There are many endemic fauna because of the isolation caused by the rugged terrain of this area.

6.5) Things to do in the Rainforest

What to do in the Amazon Rainforest? The answer may be obvious; seeing some of the most pristine nature on the planet, but of course than other questions arises, how, when and where...

These questions are less easy to answer but we will here try to give you a good overview of all the things to in the rainforest. As this part of the country contains several big natural parks, protecting local fauna and flora and local indigenous communities, it is obvious that this part of Peru holds the bigger part of natural diversity in this country. This makes that this part of the country is visited to be able to see wildlife in the nature which in many parts of the world are only known in zoos. Animals such as monkeys, sloths, caimans, snakes can be seen in these woods. Apart from these animals the Amazon rainforest may even be more famous for its diversity of birds. Toucans, macaws, and thousands of other birds can be spotted here. These are best seen from a canopy walkway taking you over bridges spanned between the high tress to give you the best overview of the forest life below. Ornithologists will have their hands more than full spotting and documenting the innumerable number of birds in this area, many still undiscovered.

Another thing to do in the rainforest is a river excursion. As the rivers are the highway of this area, it is almost inevitable to move around in the jungle without using the rivers provided in this large basin. The smaller rivers are also where you have most chance of seeing one of the bigger mammals living in this area. In case you would like to spot a jaguar, the river would be your best chance.

When crossing the small rivers that run as a labyrinth through this entire area, you will often be astounded by the wall of green on the shores of the rivers and understand why this land always has and will be the lesser known. In these rivers live another spectacular animal only found in these regions; the pink dolphin. This animal on the verge of extinction can still be seen quite often on these rivers, especially the direct branches or the Amazon River itself. They are far from shy and it does happen that they almost mingle with people when swimming in the river.

A lot of the life that goes on in the jungle happens on the jungle floor. Hundreds of insects, spiders, snakes, and other creatures habit this part of the jungle and have created a well-established pick order. If you have the chance you should focus for a while on the activity happening here. Large tracks of ants, building their highways while carrying three times their own weight and destroying all on their way, termites constructing towers as high as man, spiders weaving their webs in between trees and plants. Just look down and enjoy the world on the floor; another of the amazing things to do in the rainforest.

Of course a jungle experience is not complete without having spent the night. In the night you will be exposed to a true nature concert of incredible force. Frogs, toads, birds and insects start making a great cacophony of jungle sounds. Under your mosquito net you will feel and hear the true feel of the rainforest, a forest that maybe even lives more at night than during the day. An evening walk will also help you appreciate the nightfall and sunset over these forests and its inhabitants.

Finally a jungle experience also has its urban centers. These urban centers are the gravity point of all movements and connection with the outside world. From here airports or bigger harbors lead to terminals in the Andes or the Coast. Roads are very few and only the Peruvian Western cloud forests are connected with roads to the rest of the country. The cities are therefore also the trading grounds of all that can be traded in the jungle; fruits, vegetables, exotic animals, special plants and herbs, and what have you not. Therefore a visit to an original jungle market, in many cities floating on the river is definitely an unforgettable experience. One of the most famous in South America being in Iquitos, called El Mercado flotante de Belen.

As you can read, and this is only a summarized list of the things you can do in the rainforest, the Peruvian Amazon rainforest is full of experiences, encounters and surprises. Therefore we would say that a thorough visit of Peru is not complete without having seen the mighty jungle that houses this country.

6.6) Gastronomy in the Jungle

When talking about typical Peru foods, one would not immediately think off the jungle as being part of the culinary tour of Peru. Even though the jungle kitchen is not as elaborated as that of the typical Peru food of the coast, they do have some very special and typical dishes that are definitely worth a try. Especially “Juane”, a dish made of rice and chicken, but boiled in banana leaves so it becomes a sort of tamale. Dishes served with rice and beans or lentils are legion and with the many rivers it is no surprise that fish is part of the daily jungle diet. Typical Peru foods from the coast have also reached the jungle looking at the large number of Chifa’s that you can find in most jungle cities. Ceviche in many forms made from river fish can be a delicacy especially taking into consideration the temperature in these parts.

7) Arequipa and the Colca Canyon

7.1) Arequipa and the Colca Canyon General

When traveling the South of Peru, Arequipa and the Colca Canyon are of course two sights not to be missed. Arequipa is Peru’s second biggest city and economically after Lima the country’s most important. With over a million of people living and working in it, many coming from other parts of Peru and South America, it is not strange that the city has a kind of metropolis feeling about it. Located at the river Chili in a plain sided by the Volcano Misti on one side and lower Andes peaks giving out to the coast at 100Km away, Arequipa is also the biggest Peruvian city in the Andes. It has an altitude of 2300 meter above sea level and is surrounded by more than 80 volcanoes, some active some not anymore.

These volcanoes also give Arequipa its nickname of “White City”. The city, especially the city centre is constructed out of sillar, a type of white volcanic rock found in large numbers in the Arequipa region. The Plaza de Armas, reputedly the most beautiful main square in Peru is especially marked by the use of this stone. The square on three sides delimited by galleries made of this volcanic rock and on side by the impressive Cathedral of Arequipa, with its two typical towers. From one side of the square one can see the Volcano Misti right in between the two towers of the Cathedral.

Apart from strolling through the city centre, Arequipa is also known for its Monastery. The Santa Catalina Monastery is one of the biggest monasteries in South America and compromises around 20.000 square meter, several city blocks. The building started in 1580 and lasted about a hundred years to finish it to size of today.

That the city and region where important before the arrival of the Spanish is proven by the Juanita Museum. This museum, officially known as the “Museu Santuarios Andinos”, has as sole exhibition the mummy of Juanita, also known as the Lady of Ampato. This mummy was found on one of the volcanoes as a sacrifice from the Inca’s to their gods.

Another region, visibly touched by the Inca's and another reason why people visit the Arequipa region is the Colca Canyon. This canyon located at about 160Km from Arequipa, is the second deepest canyon known in the world. Twice as deep as the Colca Canyon it is a true impressive sight. The deepest canyon the Cotahuasi Canyon is also located close by but with only 150 meters more depth and lesser view the Colca Canyon is the canyon to see. The Colca Canyon is a canyon starting gradually to go down from Chivay, the main city in the canyon. In the beginning it is quite wide and not as deep, but as you go along you can more and more appreciate the sheer drop this canyon shows at times. Once you reach the Cruz del Condor, halfway the canyon you can see that the Canyon already has a depth of over 1500 meters. The deepest point of the Canyon is over 3000 meters. Cruz del Condor is the other reason people come to this canyon. This is one of the few places where the chances on seeing a condor are quite existent. Especially in the morning and the late afternoon, the hunting times, you can see these magnificent animals flying by. Flying, floating maybe better said as they seem to fly effortless, floating on the warm turbine winds rising out of the canyon. Of course this area is a prime hiking and outdoor activities paradise and many activities such as multiday hikes, river rafting and mountain biking can be done in this region.

7.2) Arequipa and Colca Canyon History

From the era before the Spanish conquest, little is known of the region around Arequipa. At one point this area was inhabited by Aymara from the Lake Titicaca region, but the Inca's have also left behind some proof of their dominance in this region.

The Misti volcano is currently inactive, but had strong eruptions between the years 1438 and 1471. Arequipa has more than 80 volcanoes nearby, most of which can be found in the Valley of the Volcanoes. Unfortunately the city was built on a very earthquake prone area, and was completely destroyed by earthquakes and volcanic eruptions during the 17th century.

The modern city of Arequipa was founded on 15 August 1540 by Garci Manuel de Carbajal, an emissary of the conqueror Francisco Pizarro. One year later King Charles V of Spain gave it the rank of city and the coat of arms that it still bears.

On 21 July 1821, when San Martin declared Peru's independence from the Spanish colony, and during the 19th century Arequipa was one of the richer cities in Peru and hoe to a big part of Peruvian aristocracies.

Its colonial buildings were erected in sillar (pearl coloured volcanic rock) which was used abundantly throughout the city, giving it the nickname of "The White City". In 2000 when being declared the city centre a world heritage site, UNESCO declared; "The historic centre of Arequipa is an example of ornamental architecture, representing a masterpiece of the European creative coalition and native characteristics." "A colonial village challenged by the conditions of nature, indigenous influence, the process of conquest and evangelization as well as spectacular natural scenery."

The White City of Arequipa has become the centre of economic growth in the south and is one of the most important producers of cement, iron and milk in the country. This has allowed Arequipa to develop and grow in population and change over the years. In the mid-20th century, especially in the era of the Sendero Luminoso when many villages in the Andes suffered from the repression, there was an influx of immigration from the highlands and mountain areas, and now Arequipa's population is a mixture of Spanish, indigenous and mixed.

7.3) Arequipa & Colca Canyon Museums

Not surprisingly, seeing the history of this city, the city also houses a number of good and fascinating museums. The most famous is the Museo Santuarios Andinos, home to the famous mummy of Juanita.

Museo Santuarios Andinos

The 'Ice Princess' of Juanita is displayed at the Museo Santuarios Andinos within a frozen glass container, is displaced here when not abroad, while almost 20 other mummies are also housed here, mostly from Peru, some from Chile and even Argentina. Multilingual guided tours are available, taking visitors around the woodcarvings, gold works and textiles.

Museo Regional Historico Etnologico Municipal (Municipal History Museum of Arequipa)

Sited within a somewhat neglected colonial building and standing close to the San Francisco Church, the Museo Regional Historico Etnologico Municipal is brimming with historical paintings, maps, documents and other artifacts. Particularly fascinating are the somewhat satirical caricatures, which were created by local Peruvian artists Jorge Vinatea Reynoso (1900 to 1931) and depict important Peruvian individuals from the 19th century.

Museo de Arqueologico de Universidad Catolica de Santa Maria

Managed by the city's university, in the Museo de Arqueologico de Universidad Catolica de Santa Maria is where you will find a series of interesting displays relating to local archaeological excavations. Students can guide you around the exhibits, which include a rather impressive collection of ancient ceramics, which remain very well preserved.

7.4) Arequipa and Colca Canyon Climate

The climate of Arequipa is one that is especially warm and rather dry, all through the year. Arequipa lies on the border of the southernmost tip of Peru's Desert Coast and the Andes and hence enjoys plenty of, sometimes strong sun with daytime temperatures rarely falling under 20°C.

At night however temperatures in Arequipa can drop sharply, particularly in June, July and August, when evening temperatures hover around 10°C and winds can pick up making it feel quite chilly.

Rain is something hardly seen in Arequipa outside of the rainy season. Even in the rainy season from December to March, with its high point in February, the rain does not fall like in some of the other Andean cities such as Puno and Cusco. Arequipa is a city having an almost spring like climate all year round.

The Colca Canyon is more prone to the climate grills of the high Andean Mountains. Located somewhat higher than Arequipa and surrounded by snowcapped mountains, this region gives you more the feeling of the Andean highlands, and for a reason. Being surrounded by large "Altiplanos" Andean flat highlands, temperatures in this region do fluctuate a lot. In general there are two seasons in this as in most Andean regions; the Dry and the Wet season. The wet season starts around December and ends around March. The dry season makes up the rest of the year. In the transition periods (November & April) rain can still fall but the days will start to brighten up until they are with clear blue skies all day long. The sun is due to the altitude a factor to keep in mind as the solar radiation is very strong in this region. This makes day temperatures in these months quite warm at times.

When the sun goes down, and mind you this can be very soon as you are in a steep canyon, the temperatures go down significantly. In the months June, July and August temperatures at night well below freezing are frequent. In the morning it takes a couple of hours to warm up again but once the sun breaks through, the canyon will quickly warm up before cooling down at night again.

7.5) Arequipa and Colca Canyon Geography

The geography of the Arequipa region is maybe one of the most dramatic in the country, and in a country as Peru this is quite the statement.

Located in a region filled with more than 80 volcanoes, among them several active, the two deepest canyons in the world in their back yard and with a volcano well over 5000 meters looking down over them, this region is a playground for geologists.

Located at an altitude of 2328 meters above sea level, in a large plain at the river Chili, this city has expanded its wing to the high rising flanks of the volcanoes flanking the city and on the other side stretched out over the entire plain. On the other side of the Misti you can find the Colca River.

The Colca River starts high in the Andes at Condorama Crucero Alto; below the Colca canyon, as it crosses the plains of Majes it is known as the Majes River, and then is known as the Camana before reaching the Pacific Ocean at the town of that name. Parts of the canyon are habitable, and Inca and pre-Inca terraces are still cultivated along the less precipitous canyon walls. The small town of Chivay is on the upper Colca River, where the canyon is not so deep but where many terraces are present in the canyon, continuing for many kilometers downstream. As the canyon deepens downriver, a series of small villages is spread out over the approximately 56 km between Chivay and the village of Cabanaconde.

7.6) Things to see and do in Arequipa and the Colca Canyon

Arequipa and the Colca Canyon region are as many places in Peru home to such a wide variety of things to see and do, that it can easily be a holiday destination on its own. Nevertheless, few people have/ take the time to really get to know this proud part of Peru. Following list will probably give you a small preview on the many things this region has to offer;

Visit Arequipa city centre; walk through this beautiful ancient city centre established in 1540 and never lost its importance in Peru. This importance you will feel instantly when setting foot on the main square of this White City and see its galleries and proud Cathedral with the typical two towers.

Visit the Santa Catalina Monastery; This more than 20.000 square meter monastery which today is still in use by about 20 nuns, is a maze of small walkways and patios painted in the most Mediterranean colors. Most of the monastery is open to the public and some areas have been reconstructed to the glory days of this monastery.

Drive to the Colca Canyon; not only the Colca Canyon itself makes the visit a worthwhile one, the drive back and forth to Arequipa or Puno is definitely full of views not easily forgotten. When leaving Arequipa with the Misti volcano at your right hand side, you will be happy to stop now and then to take up the amazing views and sights around. This trip will take you through the Salinas National Reserve, home to many Vicañas, a small mammal family of the llama. Here you will cross what will be for many people the highest point on their trip, “el mirador de volcanos” at 4900 meters above sea level. From here you can see several volcanoes, several active. After this point you will start descending into the canyon until you reach Chivay, the biggest town in the canyon.

Bath in the thermal baths; Located at 5 kilometers from Chivay, these are maybe some of the nicest thermal baths to be found in Peru. Los Baños Termales de Caleras are fed by water heated by the nearby volcano activity and led into several large pools. The water has temperatures around 32°C. and is in contrary to many other thermal baths crystal clear. That these baths were used in ancient times you can appreciate from the small Inca ruins that are located at the other side of the river running through the valley. Some hotels (Casa Andina and the Colca Lodge) offer private thermal baths to their guests.

Wonder at the Condors floating on the thermal winds; Cruz del Condor, located almost half way in the canyon is probably Peru's and maybe even South America's most famous place to spot the mighty condor in its true habitat. This place is home to a large condor family that has been here for decennia. In the morning and late afternoon during most months of the year some members of this family can be seen here drifting on the thermal winds rising out of the canyon. Some will even fly closely over the spectators as if they were giving a show of their dominance in this canyon.

Hike down to the canyon floor and really appreciate the magnitude of this place; not for the fainthearted; going down to the floor of the second deepest canyon in the world. All of the different hikes taking you down will obviously involve a lot of going down and going up. Most people do this on a two day hike going down from Cobanaconde to the so called "Oasis" located on an island in the Colca River. You will descend about 1600 meters before arriving in this beautiful place in the middle of the river and surrounded by palm trees. The next day you will however have to climb again to get out of the canyon.

7.7) Arequipa Gastronomy

Arequipa cuisine has been more heavily influenced by Spanish colonial cuisine than that in Lima and it has remained relatively free from the later influence of immigrants who migrated to Lima, such as the Chinese and Japanese. The area's peppers and chili peppers, various fruits and vegetables, beef, sheep, guinea pig, pig, alpaca, ostrich, variety of fish and shrimp, milk and high quality cheeses, wines and pisco, corn, all provide great flavors. The restaurants where traditional food is sold are called picanterías. Arequipa is maybe less the place where Peruvian food mixes with foreign food but all the more where Peruvian foods from the different regions get mixed and new local flavors are found.

8) Puno & Lake Titicaca

8.1) Puno & Lake Titicaca General

Lake Titicaca, one of those strange names found on the map of South America. This lake, the highest navigable lake in the world, and its islands, located at 3811meters above sea level, are other main tourist attractions this country has to offer.

The region is home to several ancient cultures and the recognized birth ground of the Inca's. The first civilization known in the Lake Titicaca region is the Tiahunaco civilization, a civilization that influenced the Inca' strongly in their building techniques. The Aymara were the descendants of the Tiahunaco culture and conquered by the Inca's somewhere around 1400AC.

According Inca legends, the first Inca, Manco Inca was born out of Lake Titicaca, supposedly by the Sun and Moon Island on the Bolivian side of the lake. The lake is located on the border of these two countries and Peru has about 60% of the lake in their territory.

The biggest Peruvian settlement on the shore of Lake Titicaca is Puno. Being the biggest city on the border and in part of Peru, it is obvious that Puno has its importance as being a mayor transport and commercial hub for this part of the country. Its closeness to Bolivia also makes it a transport hub for travelers coming or going to Bolivia. From here you can go almost directly to La Paz, Arequipa and Cusco. The main reason for tourists to come to Puno is to see Lake Titicaca and its islands. From Puno you can start your full day or multiday stay on Lake Titicaca. Visit the floating islands of Uros, hike Taquile Island or maybe spend the night on Amantani Island with a local family.

Another reason to visit Puno and the islands is the fact that Puno is the unofficial folklore culture capital of Peru. Here there are hold many feasts, many still springing from the Inca age and some mixed with Spanish folklore and religious celebrations. The most famous of all Puno festivals is without doubt the Fiesta de La Virgen de La Candelaria, celebrated every February.

With clear blue skies reflecting in the water of the Lake surrounded by large highland plains on one side and a snowcapped mountain chain on the other, this is a view you will not likely forget.

8.2) Puno & Lake Titicaca History

The history of the Lake Titicaca area is documented by the large number of ruins from Inca and Pre Inca times that can be found in this area. The two mayor pre Inca sites that one can find around this region are the Ruins of Tiahunaco and the funerary towers of Sillustani. The first was built by one of the earliest civilizations and can be found on the Bolivian side of the Lake. These ruins are seen as one of the foundations of Inca architecture. Building constructions used in this site can be found back in many of the buildings constructed by the Incas in later ages. Sillustani is a pre-Inca burial ground on the shores of Lake Titicaca near Puno. The tombs, which are built above ground in tower-like structures called chullpas, are the vestiges of the Colla people, the Aymara who were conquered by the Inca in the 1400s. The structures housed the remains of complete family groups, although they were probably limited to nobility. Many of the tombs have been dynamited by grave robbers, while others were left unfinished.

Ancestor worship and kinship were integral parts of Aymara culture, and the chullpas were built to emphasize the connection between life and death. The insides of the tombs were shaped like a woman's uterus, and corpses were mummified in a fetal position to recreate their birth. Some of the tombs also have lizards carved into the stone. Because they could re-grow their tails, lizards were considered a symbol of life. The only openings to the buildings face east, where it was believed the Sun was reborn by Mother Earth each day.

The architecture of the site is often considered more complex than typical Inca architecture. In contrast with the Inca, who used stones of varying shapes, the Colla used even rectangular edges. While chullpas are not unique to Sillustani and are found across the Altiplano, the site is considered the best and most preserved example of them. Apart from the remnants and constructions these left behind, we have not much proof anymore of these civilizations.

The Aymara were, as many people in this part of South America, were incorporated into the Inca society around the 1400's. They took over a large part of their constructing skills and the societies were completely submerged into the Inca culture. The process of this is still unclear as the Inca Legend says that the first Inca, Manco Inca was born on the Island of the Sun and according to Andean legend, Lake Titicaca was the birthplace of civilization. Viracocha, the creator deity, lightened a dark world by having the sun, moon, and stars rise from the lake to occupy their places in the sky. From here he travelled north until Cusco where he established the capital of this new empire. This why the islands on lake Titicaca, especially Taquile and Isla del Sol have several small to medium sized ruins and terracing that goes back for hundreds of years and are still being cultivated today.

Taquile, whose Quechua name some believe was Intika, was part of the Inca Empire and has a number of Inca ruins. The island was one of the last locations in Peru to capitulate to Spanish domination during the Spanish conquest of Peru. It was captured for Carlo V and eventually passed to Count Rodrigo of Taquila, who inspired the island's current name. The Spanish forbade traditional dress and the islanders adopted the Spanish peasant dress that they are known for still using today, which they combine with extraordinarily finely-made Andean-style garments.

On Amantani Island you can find other Inca ruins, among them are the most famous called Pachamama & Pachatata (Mother Earth & Father Earth). There are also eight communities on the island.

The floating islands are supposedly constructed by refugees to escape the Inca in the 13th Century and inventively used the high reeds that can be found on the lake to develop islands, providing them with the space to live on the lake.

Lake Titicaca is truly a place where history is very much still alive. Walking through these highlands, see the islanders cultivate their crops as doing hundreds of years ago and see communities were time almost appeared to have stand still. And almost anywhere you go in this region, the beautiful deep blue color of the lake with the snowcapped mountains reflecting will never be far away. After a visit to this region you will understand why this was such an important area this was to ancient civilizations.

8.3) Lake Titicaca & Puno Museums

Being a region with so much history, Puno was until recently not really known as a city where you could find many museums. However the offer not that big, this has become much better over the last few years. Puno's most important museums are;

The Dreyer Museum, close to the main square, exhibiting objects that are found on the islands and in the lake. The Yavari boat museum, this boat is the remnant of Peru's greater times in 1862 when plans were made to use two of these boats to conduct trade around the lake and transport products coming from the Bolivian jungle. Two boats travelled from England to Tacna and were dismantled there only to be transported to Puno and assembled here for use on the lake. This boat is the only boat that remains and has an interesting exhibition about the history of the boat and the lake inside.

Another relatively new art museum is the Galindo Gallery with paintings in the Cusco School style. Finally you have the Paleontological Museum and the Totorá Museum.

8.4) Puno & Lake Titicaca Climate

Puno's elevation is about 3,822m gives it of course a harsh mountain climate. The elevation make that the sun during the day is quite strong and hot and that you should at all times be protected against the sun during the day. Especially in the top of the dry season (which is also the high season for tourism- July / August) you must make sure to be well protected. The days are without clouds and you will probably spend quite some time walking and sailing on a boat. In the wet season, the days are not necessarily as wet as in Cusco but you can have quite the shower now and then. These will mainly fall at night but in January and February the weather is very unpredictable. Another factor to keep in mind is the wind. Located at a bay of the lake, with mountains on the other side, the winds coming from the lake can have quite some effect on the temperatures in Puno. In the evening when the sun goes down, the temperatures drop significantly and can easily go below 0°C. Finally, it is necessary to keep the altitude in mind, whatever you do in Puno. Its location over 3800 meters make every activity much harder and you will be surprised of the number of times you will have to catch your breath the first couple of days on this altitude.

8.5) Puno & Lake Titicaca Geography

The geography of the entire region is dominated by this huge lake. Lake Titicaca, the second biggest lake in South America, located at 381 meters above sea level, is about 190 on 80 kilometers large and roughly making up about 8370 square kilometers. The lake its deepest point is almost 300 meters and the average depth is about 100 meters. The lake contains 42 islands and the biggest is the Island of the Sun in Bolivia, close to Copacabana the biggest city on the Bolivian side of the lake. Puno on the other side of the lake is the biggest Peruvian city located on the lake and the main economic centre of the region. The rest of the region is dominated by large highland plains with smooth hills rolling up to altitudes over 4000 meters. On the other side of the lake, you can see the Cordillera Real with its snowcapped peaks rising well over 6000 meters.

8.6) Puno & Lake Titicaca Things to see

The thing to see and do in Puno as quite numerous and since most of these take place outside a lot depends on the weather and hence time of year. The best time to visit this region would be from Mid-March to November. The rest of the year the climate can be quite wet.

Visit the Floating Islands of Uros; these worldwide known floating islands belong to ancient refugees seeking a place to live on the lake. The original habitants did not allow them space on te lake shore, obliging them to search for another solution. The other solution was to use the reeds growing on the lake and transform them to the bases for floating islands. Not only their islands and houses are made out of reed, you will be surprised by the ships made in this product found extensively around the lake.

Visit the typical Ticianian Islands of Taquile and Amantani; these islands are probably some of the best preserved places in the Peruvian highlands where people have managed to hold on many aspects of the life as it was lead before on these islands. If possible you should of course eat trout on one of these islands and spend the night with a local family if possible. If you do then you also may have the time to walk around these magical islands, surrounded by the deep blue waters of the lake. There are several ruins to be discovered where you may quite possible be alone to enjoy the sights.

Visit the Sillustani Funerary Towers; These pre Inca funerary towers were constructed by the Aymara people and used to make sacrifices to their gods and hold funerary services. They are quite the site and together with the situation on the shore of Lake Titicaca is worthwhile visit.

Celebrate the “Fiesta de La Virgen de la Candelaria” in Puno; this yearly festival hosted by Puno is one of the many strange festivals made up of combining ancient Andean religion with catholic traditions. This celebration is to celebrate the Virgen de la Candelaria, but is expressed by a weeklong festival of music parades and typical dances in the most colorful suites you can imagine. The city can get a bit rough towards the end of the week but this is definitely an experience of Andean culture not easy to forget.

Travel from Puno to Cusco; this trip can be done in several ways, with a night bus, with a VIP tourist bus and with the luxurious **Andean Explorer Train**. The trip is a very beautiful ride of about 8-10 hours, depending on the mode of transport. The countryside will give you a good feeling of the typical highland plains and mountain ranges that cross this part of Peru. The train will take you to Cusco in just under 10 hours in great luxury. With the bus the trip takes about 8 hours and is broken up 4 times for some excursions to lesser known Inca ruins, a viewing point and a remarkable small historic church.

9) South Coast

9.1) South Coast General

Going from North to South along the Pacific Ocean, let's say Lima the northern point and Tacna the most southern, the south coast of Peru, together with Lima is one of the most populated areas of the country. The region, mostly made up out of different types of desert, sand desert to rock desert, with green fertile river deltas, has been home to different cultures throughout the large history of this part of Peru. The coastal plains of Peru are proven to be one of the oldest inhabited parts of South America. Here the Moche Culture and before them the Norte Chico cultures have left their marks in this region. The area around Ica and Nazca has many ancient constructions and temples going back to 1000's of years BC.

Later cultures include the Nazca Culture, mainly known for their mysterious Nazca Lines. In the 15th century these lands were conquered by the Inca's who incorporated them into their empire and started intense trading with the coast, sierra and jungle people from all over their empire. This is when the Peruvian vial system received its first boost. The Inca's, masters in constructing roads and paths in impossible places, prepared a road map crossing the entire empire from north to south and east to west. After the arrival of the Spanish, the Inca Empire started crumbling down and the coast was one of the first regions to fall to the reign of the Spaniards. Soon enough they found out the importance of this vial system and started marching towards Cusco and other cities in the mountains.

Nowadays the coast is a combination of cities located besides the Pan-American Highway, and fertile plains where agriculture is the main source of income. The region is also home to some of the bigger cities in Peru. On the South Coast the bigger cities are Ica, Pisco, Chincha, Nazca, Moquegua and Tacna. Ica and Pisco are known for their wine and pisco distilleries and the origins of the true Peruvian aguardiente Pisco, can be found here. Chincha is known as being one of the cradles of Afro Peruvian culture, being home to one of the bigger Afro Peruvian communities in Peru. Nazca is of course known for the Nazca Lines which you can fly from here and the cementary of Chauchilla, an open field using a an ancient burial ground. Tacna is the last city before the (long disputed) border with Chile and home to some of the most proud Peruvians you will find.

The South Coast is also home to the National park of Paracas, holding the famous Ballestas islands. At these islands, home to many endemic bird species and sea lions, even are home to pinguins and even whales can be spotted her during some time of the year.

The weather is relatively hot and very dry all year round. Located in the desert, it enjoys a mild desert climate with lots of sun, and colder nights. The summer months, from December through March are the hottest months and the months when the beaches south of Lima are most popular. As the waters have a current coming from the south, the temperatures are not that high and swimming is only nice during the summer months.

9.2) South Coast history

The History of the South Coast is one of the most extensive in Peru and even South America. Some of the oldest civilizations appeared in the region around 6000BC as is proven in the coastal provinces of Chilca and Paracas.

The Paracas culture emerged on the South Coast of Peru around 300BC. Other cultures such as the Moche and Nazca Culture flourished in these regions from about 100BC to about 700CE. The Moche produced impressive metalwork, as well as some of the finest pottery seen in the ancient world, while the Nazca are known for their textiles and the enigmatic Nazca lines.

The Nazca Culture was discovered in the 1890s, when a German archaeologist named Max Uhle discovered the Nazca ceramics at many archaeological sites, started to classify them and also made them known around the world.

The Nazca culture had as its main capital the Ceremonial City of Cahuachi, an ancient pilgrimage center that is located some 28 km southwest of the modern city of Nazca. According to archaeologists, the Nazca culture thrived between 500 BC and around 600 AD, and their cultural influence covered an area of almost 600 km, with the Ceremonial Center of Cahuachi as its capital.

It was the capital of political and religious power of the rulers of the Nazca culture to the people who organized the valleys from Ica to Acari for the construction of large works, such as Cahuachi or the world-famous Nazca Lines. The Nazca culture is credited with making the famous Nazca Lines, as the evidence abounds. Most of the animal figures and other designs that were etched onto the desert surface are repeatedly seen also on the pottery and textile iconography left behind under their necropolis and found around the desert and at the archaeological site of Cahuachi.

In the Nazca desert, the presence of over 300 hundreds figures and over 10,000 lines has been recorded, covering a huge area of 525 km, according to archaeologists and scholars. Italian archaeologist Giuseppe Orefeci believes the Nazca people lived for over 800 years at the ceremonial centre of Cahuachi, and it began to decline due to certain natural disasters that took place around 350 AD. One hypothesis is that during this time there were changes in the climate and El Niño caused a great flood that engulfed a big portion of the Nazca valley, including the ceremonial centre of the Nazca people Cahuachi.

It was around 400 AD that the Nazca people abandoned Cahuachi and moved out to the upper section of the valley, where the modern Nazca city lies today. In addition to the Nazca geoglyphs, as they are archaeologically called, it is also important to mention their great achievements in hydraulic engineering. The famous underground channels of Nazca, locally known as Puquios (a Quechua word to describe a natural spring), are one of the greatest legacy also left behind by the Nazca Culture, this unique underground system is unique in South America and perhaps in the whole world, as their construction are very intricate. The Nazca culture built over 50 underground channels in the Nazca region between the years 400 AD till around 500 AD, and many of them are still in use by the local communities in the Nazca Valley.

The Nazca Lines were first spotted when one of the first Peruvian airlines called Faucette, started to fly from Lima to Arequipa in the 1920's. Pilots who flew over this area had noticed that between the valleys of Palpa and Nazca there were many lines crisscrossing the desert in all directions, this great news were shown at the local papers in Lima, and soon arose the interest of some people.

The Nazca Lines have always been a mystery and probably will stay so. Nevertheless, many scholars and archeologists have spent their lives studying and protecting these so impressive and mysterious lines and gigantic drawings. The most famous is probably Maria Reich after whom the museum about the lines in Nazca is called.

9.3) South Coast Museums

Museo de Piedras Grabadas (Engraved Stones Museum) in Ica

A museum dedicated to a somewhat X file history. The Ica stones are a collection of stones allegedly discovered in a cave near Ica, Peru. The stones have had their oxidized surfaces engraved with depictions that call into question just about everything science has taught us about the origin of our planet, ourselves, and other species. For example, some of the stones depict men (who look like ancient Incas or Aztecs) attacking huge stylized monsters with axes. The monsters are said to be dinosaurs. (One film production company goes so far as to claim that the monsters on the stones are "realistic depictions of Stegosaurus, Tyrannosaurus Rex and Pterodactyls.")

The cave where the stones were allegedly discovered has never been identified, much less examined by scientists. Skeptics consider the stones to be a pathetic hoax, created for a gullible tourist trade.

The Ica stone craze began in 1996 with Dr. Javier Cabrera Darquea, a Peruvian physician who allegedly abandoned a career in medicine in Lima to open up the Museo de Piedras Grabadas (Engraved Stones Museum) in Ica. There he displays his collection of several thousand stones.

Museo Regional de Ica (Regional historical Museum)

Mummies, Ceramics, textiles, funerary bundles and physical remains from Nazca, Paracas and Inca cultures.

Museo Arqueológico Alejandro Pezzia Aseretto in Ica (Archeological Museum)

Archaeological Pieces and historical relics

Museo Maria Reich in Nazca

Located near the desert, close to the Nazca Lines, this was the place that housed Maria Reiche for many years. From here she used to leave every day to the desert in order to study the Nazca Lines and figures. Maria Reiche dedicated over 50 years of her life to study, protect and measure the Nazca Lines. At the little museum you will be able to see Maria Reiche's pictures, including some of her tools she used when investigating. She died in 1998, and her grave lies in the museum grounds.

Museo Arqueologico Antonini in Nazca

Informative museum about the surrounding archeological sites. It also has a collection of pottery and textiles. In the garden there is a working aqueduct and a scale model of the lines.

Museo Histórico Regional INC in Tacna

Pottery and textile collections from the pre-Columbian Cultures. Also holds and exhibition of weapons and relics of the war against Chile.

Museo de la Iglesia Compañía de Jesús in Pisco

Religious Paintings and objects

Museo de Sitio de Paracas Julio C. Tello in Pisco

The exhibits are from the burial sites discovered by the Peruvian archaeologist, Julio C. Tello, under the Paracas desert in 1925

Paracas Museum in Paracas

A small museum close by the location of Paracas culture tombs found on and around Cerro Colorado. Highlights are the well preserved, bright textiles of these pre-Nazca peoples, and human remains showing the extreme body manipulations (skull elongations, trepanning) they practiced.

9.4) South Coast Climate

The south coast probably has some of the most “boring” climates one can imagine. Being located on a small stretch of desert land, perched in between the high Andes Mountains and the Pacific Ocean; it is no wonder that these two natural boundaries are also co-responsible for the climate in this region.

The Pacific Ocean brings the cold Humboldt Current to the coast, where it clashes with the air coming from the Andes and the hot air from the desert. This creates a fog that during some times of the year can even block out the sun during the whole day. Most of the year this effect is only noticed in the morning but some parts of the coast suffers more than other. More inland, these fogs are becoming less and the sky clear up with plain sun as result.

Apart from some drizzle that may fall during some months, you will never have rain in this region and temperatures will hardly go under 15 degrees Celsius.

9.5) South Coast Geography

As you may guess the South Coast geography is made up out of the flat stretched desert that also contains northern Peru. The South coast being somewhat drier and thinner than the north coast, the geography here is also made up out of the two natural boundaries; the Andes Mountains and the Pacific Ocean.

The land itself is made up out of different types of desert with fertile green river deltas running to the sea in between them. On the South Coast a large part of the desert found is sand desert. This patch of desert in between Ica and Nazca is one of the driest deserts in the world and completely made up out of large sand dunes that due to the winds coming from the Ocean nearby are changing constantly and give one the true Sahara feeling. Besides the sand desert, large parts of rock desert and mixed desert can be found in this region. The desert reaches all the way to the foot of the Andes, which quickly reach altitudes over 3000 meters. More to the south, before Arequipa, the coast reaches its thinnest point, having the Pacific Ocean almost immediately going up into the Andes Mountains.

The South Coast, a small but flat stretch of land reaching from North to South is obviously a opportunistic place for transport and hence home to the largest highway in the world; the Pan-American highway. This highway, stretching out for thousands of kilometers, passes by the smaller and bigger cities in the region, crosses the Nazca lines and shows you the great versatility of agriculture found here.

9.6) Things to see in Southern Peru

With a rich history, thousands of kilometers of coastline, amazing and vibrating cities, it is obvious that the Peruvian South Coast has plenty to offer to travelers. If we would make a list going from Lima south until you reach Tacna and the Chilean border, it would look like this;

Pisco; get to know the home of Peru's most famous liquor and source of disputes with Chile; Pisco. Here you can find some of the most famous distilleries and wineries of the country. Also home to the yearly harvest festival; La Fiesta de la Vendimia.

Paracas; From here you can visit the Paracas National Reserve and the Ballestas Islands. These islands and national park are home to thousands of birds, sea lions, penguins, and even whales.

Ica; The other big Pisco and wine city of Peru. Home to many large and historical wineries making some of Peru's finest wines and Pisco's. Also a big afro Peruvian city, making sure that beats on the typical Cajon Peruano will never be far away.

Huacachina; Located at only 10 minutes from Ica, this true oasis makes you feel like stepping into "1001 nights", except in South America. This natural oasis is surrounded by some of the highest sand dunes in South America, and a real impressive site. Have a look on the fifty Soles bill to have a preview.

Chincha; Home to one of the larger Afro Peruvian communities, a very lively city and full of bustling streets and markets.

Nazca; Home to the world-famous Nazca Lines, one of the true mysteries from ancient times. The monkey, the dog, the hummingbird, and the condor are few of the over 300 large desert drawings that have been found here. Hypothesis regarding the use and mode of construction of these lines go from ancient hot air balloons to extraterrestrials. Check it out yourself and share your theory with us.

Tacna; is a lager city in southern Peru and the regional capital of the Tacna Region. It is located on the border with Chile, inland from the Pacific Ocean and in the valley of the Caplina River. Tacna is a very commercially active city, located only 35 km from the border with Chile.

Initially called San Pedro de Tacna, it has gained a reputation for patriotism, with many monuments and streets named after heroes of Peru's struggle for independence (1821–1824) and the War of the Pacific (1879–1883). Residents of Tacna are known in Spanish as tacneños.

10) North Coast

10.1) North Coast General

The Peruvian coast, comprises one of the lesser known but very interesting region of this country. The Peruvian coast, more than 2400 Km long is made up mainly out of different types of deserts with fertile river deltas giving out into the Pacific Ocean. The Northern Peruvian coast is where the focus of this article will be. The Northern Peruvian Coast stretches from Lima in the center of the country, all the way to the border with Ecuador. Piura at 20 minutes' drive from Ecuador is the largest city close to the border and for years the heart of the Peruvian – Ecuadorian border dispute. On the other end we consider the Northern Peruvian coast to reach until the western slopes of the Andes reaching down to the jungle in the west. Apart from Piura, the biggest and most important cities of the region are Trujillo, Chiclayo, Chiclayo, Cajamarca, Tumbes and the beach town Mancora.

The North Coast has been home to some of the oldest civilizations known on this continent. The Moche culture was probably the biggest before the rise of the Inca's. Remnants of these cultures can be found on several different sites throughout this region. Chan Chan, the Lord of Sipan Tombs, Los Baños del Inca, and many more are all found in this region. The region is thank to the Pan-American Highway also one of the easier to travel regions in Peru. Cities are well connected with busses and flights and you mainly travel north or south.

For the more relaxation searching visitors, the Northern Peruvian Coast has also plenty to offer. Laidback cities such as Trujillo, Cajamarca and especially Mancora in the far north guarantee you to be able to relax away before or after having visited some of the majestic sites all over this great country. Another pride of this region is their food, the best seafood and combinations with ingredients from the Andes and even the jungle can be found here.

Also weather wise the Northern Peruvian coast will provide you with all year round summer temperatures and sunshine. Mancora is also where you want to go when looking for some water sports, with water temperatures much higher than around Lima, more impressive waves and of course the facilities, Mancora is the Peruvian Mecca for water sports.

Especially surfing is big as the waves around Mancora are known for their length. For people looking for even more adventure, at 8 hours north from Lima you can find Huaraz, starting base for some of the most amazing hikes on the continent. The northern highlands do of course have other climate types as Peru's highest mountains are also located here. As the Peruvian coast is a small strip, the first slopes of the Andes already start a couple of hundred kilometers or even less inland. Climbing rapidly to heights well over 6000 meters, this part of the mountain range is known for its peaks of tremendous beauty. The highest being the Huascarán, Peru's highest mountain. Hikes in the Cordillera Blanca, starting from Huaraz are among the hardest but most rewarding on the continent.

As you can read the Northern Peruvian Coast with its beaches, cities, ancient cultures reaching to the high Andes peaks, is a diverse and fantastic region. Full of great places, amazing and hospitable people, and serving some of the best food on the continent, the Northern Peru, lesser known but so worth it...

10.2) History of the North Coast

Hunting tools dating back to more than 11,000 years have been found in the caves in different parts of the Peruvian coast and even some proof of old Andean Civilizations. Over the following three thousand years, inhabitants switched from nomadic lifestyles to cultivating land. As these inhabitants became more sedentary, farming and the keeping of life stock allowed them to build settlements and new societies emerged along the coast and in the Andean mountains. The first known city in all of the Americas was Caral, located in the Supe Valley at about 200 km north of Lima. It is the oldest city in America and was built in approximately 2500 BC.

What is left from this civilization, called Norte Chico, are about 30 pyramid structures built up in receding terraces ending in a flat roof; some of them measured up to 20 meters in height. Caral is one of six world centers of the rise of civilization.

Many of these coastal and Andean Civilizations got absorbed by the more powerful civilizations. For the northern part of Peru the dominating society was that of the Moche Culture. The Moche Culture, flourished from about 100 BC until about 700 CE, and was known for the high level of organization and architecture and maybe even more for their impressive pottery skills.

Most famous sites the Moche Culture left behind are Chan Chan, Sipan and the Temple of the Sun and the Moon. These coastal cultures eventually began to decline as a result of recurring El Niño floods and droughts. In consequence, the Huari and Tiwanaku, who dwelt inland in the Andes, became the predominant Andean Civilizations of the region encompassing much of modern-day Peru and Bolivia. In the North, they were succeeded by powerful city-states, such as Chancay, Sipan, and Cajamarca, and two empires: Chimor and Chachapoyas culture. These cultures developed relatively advanced techniques of cultivation, gold and silver craft, pottery, metallurgy, and knitting. Around 700 BC, they appear to have developed systems of social organization that were the precursors of the Inca civilization. One of the great buildings of the Chachapoyas culture can be found close to Chachapoyas and is called Kuelap.

At this time Pachacutec, one of the great Inca's gained power in Cusco and started to expand his kingdom rapidly. They arrived at the coast and quickly incorporated the coastal civilizations in their empire. Most coastal and Andean civilizations were taken in a pacific manner but some were not willing to offer their loyalty to the Incas as the Incas expanded their empire, and many were openly hostile. The other Andean Civilization; the people of the Chachapoyas culture were an example of this, but the Inca eventually conquered and integrated them into their empire. On the height of the empire the Inca Empire reached from nowadays Colombia to central Chile.

With the arrival of the Conquistadores, the Inca Empire also came to an end together with the great civilizations of the north. After arriving first in Piura and heading south, they arrived in Cajamarca, where one of the two Inca rulers had his capital, the other in Cusco. The Inca Empire was starting to suffer from its own success, debilitating the Andean Civilization due to the sheer size of its empire. Just before the arrival of the Spanish the Inca Empire was divided in two and two brothers divided the territory. This is where the Spanish found an easy ally, internal division. Easily conquering the Northern Inca Empire by winning the battle in Cajamarca; a battle in which the Inca's were faced with an enemy with weapons never seen before (horses, firearms and swords). After the fall of the Inca's, some cities in the north were rebuilt by the Spanish, such as Trujillo, Chimbote, Chiclayo and Piura, but the region had lost some of its great history.

As you can read here for many historicists the northern Peru is the baker mat of many Peruvian cultures and societies, holding some of the oldest on the continent.

10.3) North Coast Weather

Stretching along Peru's Pacific coast is a narrow strip of warm, semi-arid land. It sits in the rainshadow of the Andes, which means the mountains block the rain-bearing prevailing winds from reaching that area. The weather here is largely determined by the Pacific's Humboldt Current, a cold current that flows up from the southern tip of South America. It has a significant cooling effect on this region, generally keeping temperatures in the 20s, and also results in low rainfall. This effect lessens the further north you travel as the Humboldt Current warms up. The cool water combined with the heat means that fog and mist are regular features of coastal Peru. This region is seasonal, though the seasons are not highly distinct, and as Peru is in the Southern Hemisphere the seasons are reversed to those in the Northern Hemisphere.

Summer, from January till March, sees daily average high temperatures in the mid to high 20s. Towards the south, it rarely gets above 29°C, while to the north it regularly gets up to 35°C. Due to low humidity it cools down significantly at night, though locations directly on the coast have higher humidity and often see a temperature difference of only 5°C between day and night. Rainfall is very low. Much of the coast sees no rain, and if it falls at all it usually only does so in the evening or at night. For the northern reaches of the coast, however, December is the start of the 'rainy season', which sees the region's only reliable annual rainfall, albeit very little. El Nino does sometimes bring freak high rainfall to the coast of Peru and sometimes causes flooding.

In general one can say that the northern Peruvian coast has a very nice climate all year round. Going from North to South, Mancora weather represents a great coastal beach climate all year round. Mancora weather is almost a guarantee for hot days and some cooler nights due the wind that may pick up at night. More toward the South, the weather Trujillo sees is very mild and agreeable. Tempartures may not be as high as the Mancora weather year round but the weather in Trujillo does provide you with a nice heat and cooler nights. As Trujillo is located a bit inland, the winds do not pick up as strong and Mancora weather sometimes experiences.

10.4) Geography North Coast

The northern Peru coast consists of the eastern region of Lambayeque, the Piura Region and the Tumbes Region. They are characterized by having different climate and geography from the rest of the coast. Driving north from Trujillo, you can appreciate the views becoming somewhat different with poses of desert in between areas leaning towards tropical vegetation. Especially in the far north of the Peru coast, you can see true mangroves round Piura for instance. These are quite populated by wildlife and even crocodiles. These are protected areas in filled with tropical forests and tropical dry forests both extending into southern Ecuador. The areas of Eastern Lambayeque also have tropical dry forests which are found in the Chaparri and Chongoyape provinces.

Nevertheless, the Northern Peru Coast is a very dry and humid narrow coastal strip. Weather is good all year round and cities like Trujillo call themselves the “city of eternal spring”. Further north the weather becomes more humid as the lower mountain barrier here than in southern Peru makes that jungle winds and tropical heat make it all the way to the coast. Furthermore in this region the effects of the Humbolt current are less than in the southern Peru coast. To the east we can find the beginning slopes of the Andes mountain range, abruptly stopping the Peru coast and going uphill to almost 7000 meters at some places. The highest Peru Mountains one can find in northern Peru, after which the Andes chain towards the north gradually goes down a bit before reaching the border with Ecuador. This means that the crossing of the Andes in the northern Peru is not as demanding than in central and south Peru. The climate changes quickly as you start from the Peru coast and drive through the mountains and suddenly find yourself going down into the dens and tropical jungles of North east Peru.

10.5) Things to see on the North Coast

Besides the large number of ancient civilizations and cultures having left their enheritages lika Chan Chan, Sipan and a lagre number of remnants on which many museums have their exhibitions built, the Northern Peru Coast is also home to many other attractions and activities. Of course a tour of the North Coast would not be complete without a city tour Trujillo or a surf tour Mancora.

Starting off with the biggest city of the region, a city tour Trujillo will let you see the history of this colonial city. From Trujillo you can go towards the coast where you can find one of the most beautiful fisher villages in Peru;

The North Coast is maybe less travelled than the Southern Coast, but this is not because of the fact that the north is less interesting. Not even slightly; the south is where Machu Picchu is and this makes that most people with limited time do not go to the north. Well honestly, their loss!!!

The North coast not only provides vibrating and historic rich cities such as Trujillo, Chiclayo and Chiclayo. It is also home to one of the bigger afro- Peruvian communities in Peru, living around Piura. Here African rooted music, clothing and food is still served and the Latin vibe mixed with some African blood makes for some great and amazing cultures in this region. The history of this region you can also find outside of the cities in for example the great number of historical sites this area contains. Not surprisingly when you see the number civilizations that have roamed this area and how far they go back into time, it is not surprisingly that the area is scattered with large and impressive sites out of ancient times. Chan Chan, Sipan, The Temple of the Sun and the Moon are just a few examples. And then of course there is Caral; the oldest found city in the Americas dating from about 2500 BC.

Stretching out as a relatively narrow strip of land along the Pacific Coast, it is obvious that life here has always been heavily influenced by the ocean. This you can see in the amazing diversity of seafood they have on offer in this region. This together with the special cooking forms that characterize the Peruvian kitchen, make that the north coast stands for maybe some of the best seafood on the continent. Especially a city tour Trujillo is not complete to one of the seafood restaurants this city has to offer. When in Trujillo a visit to Huanchaco is definitely a must. This seaside town is known for good waves and even more for the fishermen riding the waves on their "caballitos", small boats made out of reed they balance on the water.

More beaches can be found when you tour Mancora and its surroundings, home to what probably are probably the best beaches in Peru. Mancora Beach comes in contrary to many Peruvian beaches with nice fine sand and large beaches. What makes Mancora maybe even more famous are the waves. More and more being promoted as Mekka of surf Peru, recently it became not only known as the best of surf Peru but even one of the better places to surf in South America. The waves at Mancora beach are known for their length and continuity. To the north and the south of Mancora you can find other beaches with great waves and little people. For people not that much into surfing, the area has also great Peru beach resorts located directly at Mancora beach.

So as you can read, north Peru holds a lot of what makes Peru famous, history, gastronomy, and good beaches. Nevertheless, not too many people visit the area, giving it even more cachet. Another pro of the area is that the area is quite easy to travel overland, compared with the Peruvian highlands. The Pan-American Highway crosses the whole region from north to south and passes by all major cities and sites in the region. Tour Trujillo, tour Mancora, stay at one of the beautiful Peru beach lodges, and the best of Peru surf if you need more reasons to visit this part of the country, please contact us...

11) North Peru Highlands

11.1) North Peru Highlands General

North Peru is maybe the less travelled region in Peru. Nevertheless, north Peru possesses a wide variety of climate zones, natural marvels and historic sites. The region is not the easiest to travel overland as it is mainly made up out of the high Andes mountains quickly rising up to almost 7000 meters and then as abruptly going down to the humid dense forest of the Amazon basin. North Peru is a miracle of small villages, interchanging climates and countryside's like you can see in few countries around the world. It is actually a sample of the whole of Peru as it possesses most of Peru's treasures in smaller but not less impressive form.

Going up from the North Peru coast to the high Andes, Peru's highest mountain can be found around the Huaraz area at about 8 hours north of Lima, you will reach the higher points in the Andes quite quick as the mountain range is relatively thin at most places. After going up the descent is a bit slower as the western slopes of the Andes, reaching into the Amazon Basin are more gradually going down, creating beautiful patches of towns located in one climate zone meanwhile a town at a couple of kilometers have a much more tropical climate. This area is also known for its waterfalls. The large quantity of water coming down from the Andes, flowing to the mighty Amazon River, makes it that the altitude differences on many occasions are defeated by beautiful waterfalls in green oasis's around North Peru. Most villages are quite small in this region and transport is done partially by road and partially by boat the more you get into the Amazon Basin. The biggest city in Northern Peru is also the biggest jungle city unreachable by road, namely Iquitos, one of the worldwide Amazon Capitals of the world. Iquitos can be reached by river from Yurimaguas, a 3 day trip on a cargo boat on the Amazon River. Even though Iquitos is located in the north, we will deal with it closer when talking about the Amazon.

City wise, as said before North Peru may not be the most interesting region, but this is made up by the large variety of villages and people inhabiting them. As this region provides a more or less easy pass through the Amazon, the region has for ages seen migration from the coast to the jungle and vice versa, creating an amazing mixture of people and cultures inhabiting these regions. You can not only see it in the people and the festivals but also in the food as they use a wide variety of ingredients from all over the country.

Another mayor site in the region is the Kuelap fortress. This fortress built at about two hours from Chachapoyas, was home to the Kuelap civilization. A pre Colombian culture from which even today is little known. The fortress is quite the impression of what this culture was capable of. Nowadays excavations go still on in the region and more and more sites are being found. This leaves many archeologists with the question if this civilization ever was in touch with the Inca civilization.

So if you are up for the challenge of travelling somewhat less comfortable and have the time to get to know a great part of Peru, where contact with the local population is not a question but a must, then why wait...North Peru can offer it all...

11.2) North Peru Highlands Climate

As you look at the map of north Peru, you can see that, as is most of Peru, the area is home to different types of climate on a relatively small area. Starting off with the Huaraz weather, it is clear that the Huaraz weather conditions are heavily influenced by its location at 3080 meters above sea level. Located in a valley surrounded by snowcapped mountains, the Huaraz weather conditions are the perfect example of the weather you can find in many of the highland towns in Peru. The dry season is from April to October after which slowly starts the wet season with its peak around January and February. The dry season is marked by clear sunny days (heavy sun) and cold nights due to the lack of clouds. This also makes it the best season for hiking as the views become even more spectacular and the nights filled with stars. Rain can happen but is very limited and mainly concentrated at night in this season. By the end of the dry season the vegetation can become somewhat browner as the drought has had its toll. In the wet season, Huaraz weather is as you would expect quite wet. In the beginning this will be mainly during the day, but by January and February these showers can last for almost all day. In the beginning and end of the rainy season, the sun does shine often and views can be equally spectacular due to the clouds playing through the highest peaks. In this season the nights are less cold but due to the rain the temperatures can drop rapidly now and then. Overall, taking into account the Huaraz weather graph, the best months for trekking would be from April to end November.

More to the north, the Andes become less wide and the climate changes we are more abruptly. As you go up from the north coast to the Andes, the mountains do not reach as high as they do around Huaraz and in the south of Peru. This makes the transfer between the ocean and the jungle less abrupt. A lot of the area is cloud forest. Cloud forests can be as dense as the deep jungle but is marked by higher vegetation. Also as the name says, cloud forests can be found on an altitude between 1000 and 2000 meter above sea level, where there is a lot of cloud formation. The climate is quite wet and humid. Temperatures reach into the high 20's and during midday much higher. In general this area has the same calendar as the highlands when it comes to rain, with the exception the quantity can be much bigger and the duration way longer. Also during the "dry season" rain is much more common here than in the highlands. This area is amazing for its views, waterfalls and vegetation that grow in the entire region. There is also still a lot of wild life in these forests such as the Speckled Bear, the only native South American bear.

11.3) North Peru Highlands geography

When talking about the geography of northern Peru (without the Coast), one first has to look at the map of northern Peru to understand this region. The north of Peru can be divided into two areas, let's say the southern part and the northern part. The difference between the two is that the Andes Mountains are much wider in the southern part than in the northern. Even more the northern part almost has no peaks over 5000 meter, meanwhile the southern part (of north Peru) hold about 60% of all mountains over 5000 meters in the country. This makes the southern part a very rugged and difficult to travel land, with very little population. The area is due to its geography facts one of the prime hiking lands in South America. With the many snowcapped peaks, crystal blue lagoons and pristine nature, this area asks to be discovered on foot.

The highest mountain in Peru, Huascarán (6,768 m), is located here. Huascarán National Park, established in 1975, encompasses almost the entire territory of the Cordillera Blanca.

Another famous mountain; the 5,947 m Alpamayo mountain was declared "World's Most Beautiful Mountain" by an international survey some years ago. The estimated number of glaciers of the Cordillera Blanca is 260. As with all Andean glaciers, the Cordillera Blanca has witnessed a major retreat of it's during the 20th century due to global climate change. Studies have shown a retreat of over 20% since the 1970s. Many experts warning that most glaciers may be gone within decades. The Laguna Parón – biggest in the Cordillera Blanca – is considered the most beautiful of all glacial lagoons; it is a deep turquoise blue.

11.4) What to do in North Peru Highlands

Being such a diverse country, Peru may not be the "easiest" destination. The things to see in Peru are numerous and range from great sites of ancient civilizations over awesome natural beauty and force to amazing cities and cultures. So when making your list of what to in Peru and the things to see in Peru, you may be tempted to skip the northern part of this so entertaining country.

As most people coming to Peru don't have the luxury of time to get to know the south and the north of this country, decisions have to be made. No one of course wants to miss out on Machu Picchu or Cusco. When interesting in hiking, the Inca trail is the first hike to come to mind. Nevertheless, for hiking the Cordillera Blanca and the Cordillera Negra are the true hikers paradise and both should be included on a what to do list a true hiker makes when coming to Peru. Not to forget the world's most beautiful mountain, the Alpamayo and the Huascarán, Peru highest mountain are definitely bad looking as one of the things to see in Peru.

Most hikes to this area start around Huaraz and most the shortest treks due require good fitness and at least 4 days to complete. But this all makes the experience so much more worth the effort.