

Exploring Peru: A Destination For All Travelers

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Seeing the Sacred Valley

The Sacred Valley—the heart and soul of the Inca Empire—has been quietly drawing travelers for years. The Inca empire was one of the most important in South America and at its height spanned a population of 10 million people from Columbia to Chile. The Sacred Valley, located between Cusco and Machu Picchu, was the site where the Incas built some of their most famous and important architectural structures. From a traveler's perspective, what makes this area so unique is that it's made of three different types of topography: valley, plateau and mountain and therefore, different activities and experiences are offered in each region. In the Urubamba River valley, travelers can explore Pisac, Ollantaytambo, and Moray archaeological sites. The Huaypo Lake is located in the plateau region and the massive Andes mountains—with their highest peak reaching 22,200 feet above sea level—appeals to even the most adventurous hiker. (Due to the high altitudes, though, it's recommended that travelers start by picking hikes and activities at a lower altitude and scaling up as they become acclimatized).

Choose Your Own Adventure

The best way to see the Sacred Valley is by actively experiencing it through walks, hikes, bike rides and village visits. The Explora Sacred Valley Peru (*explora.com*) is a hotel that bridges the remote wilderness with unique, one-of-a-kind experiences. Through sustainable development, the Explora property blends

with its surroundings while offering travelers 30 different “explorations” or experiences each day. That means if you’re traveling with your family or friends, each person can pick their own activity. Each group limited to eight people and a guide.

Options include full-day hikes like Cinco Lagunas, Amaru and La Verónica, which gives travelers the chance to see a variety of flora and fauna. That includes the chance to see some of the 400 different orchid species in this region, as well as catch a glimpse of the llamas and alpacas native to the area. The lucky enough might see the spectacle bear, a species that lives in the Andean-Amazonia region and is on the cusp of extinction. For experienced bikers, the 20-mile Huaypo ride might appeal. It explores the colonial town of Maras and its Inca salt-mines before a challenging descent to the Urubamba River.



The canopy walk allows for great views of the Amazon.

Or, if you don’t want to choose just one activity, guests can do a full-day tour combining biking and hiking. The Inca Tracks excursion, for example, combines a vigorous three-mile hike that offers amazing 360-degree views of both Cusco and the Sacred Valley, before biking through the height of the pampas—treeless plains—and then into the local Quechua farmlands where shepherds can be seen tending their animals. Keep your eyes out for the more than 200 varieties of birds that reside here, including the Andean condor and the giant

hummingbird, the largest of its kind in the world. Or, if you’re looking for less active, but equally rich cultural experiences, you can do an overland trip, such as the full-day Cusco tour. This includes exploring the fortress of Saqsaywaman and the temple of Corincancha, on which the Santo Domingo convent was built, as well as exploring the highlights of Cusco including the Museum of Pre-Columbian Art, the San Pedro Market, and the many art galleries in this picturesque town.

Since it’s recommended that visitors stay five nights at Explora, you can combine biking, hiking and overland explorations throughout your stay for a well-rounded and in-depth Sacred Valley experience. Plus, all the meals at Explora are included in the price and feature freshly-made, locally-sourced ingredients, using Peruvian recipes.

Cruising down the Amazon

For many, an Amazon River cruise is a bucket list trip, but not everyone realizes that the Pacaya Samiria National Reserve, located on 5 million acres in the northern Amazon rainforest in Peru, is one of the most protected biodiversity regions in South America and home to some of the most elusive plants and animals in the world. More than 3,000 species of fish reside here and over a third of the world’s total species of plants and animals can be found in the Amazon basin.

Delfin Amazon Cruises is the first and only cruise company to join the prestigious Relais & Châteaux portfolio. A family-friendly cruise line, it offers interconnecting rooms and special activities for kids (although it’s equally appealing to adults).

Mornings are spent gliding down the river, looking for scarlet macaws and tree sloths slowly waking up



Delfin excursions include boat rides to see flora and fauna.

after a night in the jungle. You can go swimming in a mirror-still lake that suddenly ripples with pink river dolphins or take walks with local villagers who will point out the places that poison dart frogs and anacondas call home. Spend nights fishing for red-bellied piranhas under a bright orange sunset. Other activities include early-morning bird-watching (one of the best places to bird watch in the world); kayaking and paddleboarding in the creeks and lakes looking for wildlife; or exploring along the canopy walk, one of the longest canopy walkways in the world, where travelers are 85 feet above the ground

providing amazing views of the Amazon rainforest and the animals within it.

The Delfin boats are more than a nod to sustainability. Their waterproof roof is made of local irapay leaves (seen on local village huts) and lamps are made from spare paiche fish scales. Lotions and mosquito repellents, found in all the suites, are made from native jungle ingredients. These small passenger ships—carrying from 8 to 44 passengers, depending on the vessel—create an intimate experience among guests. Most of the guides were born and raised in the Amazon, so they can tell first-hand stories about growing up there and the medicinal properties of the plants around.



The Delfin III has 22 suites (and holds 44 passengers) making it the largest vessel in their fleet.

During low water season (June through October) travelers will be able to walk the trails of the Amazon forests and see the animals and wilderness from the land. This is a good time for those travelers who want to do a lot of exploration on foot. Those who want more aquatic exploration are better off visiting during high-water season (November through May) when boats are able to explore corners of the rivers normally unattainable during the dry season.

Included in the Delfin rate are all meals (most made with local Peruvian ingredients), pisco cocktail and sours, national brand beers, house cocktails and house wines. Few things can compare to sipping a pisco sour while watching the sunset over one of the longest—and most biodiverse—rivers in the world.