

WEATHER

Cuzco's most distinct climatic feature is the pronounced contrast between the dry season, which lasts from about May to September, and the remaining wetter months of the year (with most rain falling between December and March). During the dry season, it's consistently sunny, with average daytime temperatures between **17** and **20°C (63-68°F)**, and cool to freezing nights, with the mercury hovering anywhere between a bone-tingling **1** and **7°C (34-45°F)**.

Seeing that you are in the Andes, it will be necessary to acclimate yourself. Take it easy the first day, eat light food and drink what the natives drink to keep from feeling the soroche or altitude sickness – mate de coca (coca tea). During the rainy season, wear a hat and use plenty of sun block. When travelling in the Historic Sanctuary of Machu Picchu, please follow the posted rules that will help in preserving its natural and cultural beauty.

HOW TO GET THERE?

BY BUS

From Lima: 1,104 km /21 hours
From Arequipa: 516 km/10 hours
From Nasca (Ica): 671 km/14 hours
From Puno: 389 km/6 hours

BY TRAIN

From Puno: 10 hours
From Aguas Calientes: 3 hours

BY AIR (Daily flights)

From Lima: 1 hr.
From Arequipa: 35'
From Puerto Maldonado: 30'
From La Paz-Bolivia: 1 hr. flights every other day.

SUGGESTED FOR

Archaeology lovers: who besides Machu Picchu, can visit other fabulous sights, like Choquequirao, Sacsayhuaman, Tipón, Pisac and Ollantaytambo, just to name a few.

People interested in religious landmarks, who will find the city is full of them, as are the surrounding country villages (Andahuaylillas, Huaró)

Popular traditional buffs, who can attend such festivals as the Inti Raymi and the Q'oyllur Riti.

Experiential tourism aficionados; who, at Raqchi, can share in the daily labors of the farmers there.

Handicraft collectors, who must visit the San Blas quarter in Cusco and check out the Sunday flea markets at Chinchero and Pisac.

Birdwatchers; who should not pass on the journey to Huacarpay Lagoon and the Malaga Pass.

Adventure sports lovers, who can river-raft, mountain bike, paraglide and do many other adrenaline pumping activities at spots located in and around Cusco.

MORE INFORMATION

PLACES TO VISIT

IN CUSCO

Main Square: when the Incas ruled Cusco, it was known as the Huacaypata, or “place of weeping or of meeting”, and was the backdrop to sacred ceremonies held there.

The Cathedral: Built in the 16th century, this landmark is really three churches in one as well as a depository of valuable masterpieces.

Church of Our Lady of Mercy; This church is headquarters of the Order of Mercy (Mercedarians) in Peru. It is an excellent example of architecture coming out of the time when Peru was a Spanish viceroyalty.

Church of the Company of Jesus: A Jesuit church, located to one side of the Main Square.

San Blas, quarter and church: A charming section of town where Cusco’s artisans live and work. It used to be known as the Incan quarter of T’oqokachi. Visit the church there to see a nice collection of paintings.

Archbishop Palace and the 12-angle stone: Built during the Colony on the palace foundations of one of the Incan Emperors, Inca Roca, and exhibiting definite Arabic influences, it is currently site of the Museum of Religious Art.

Sacsayhuaman archaeological complex: the Fortress, Quenqo, Pukapukara, and Tambomachay. There are 33 archaeological sites

within this area, yet obviously the most important is Sacsayhuaman itself. Its name means “house of the sun”, and every June 24th, the Inti Raymi Festival of the Sun is celebrated at this spot.

IN THE SACRED VALLEY OF THE INCAS

Pisac: Go to this village to experience its handicraft market as well as to see ancient Incan constructions: an irrigation system, and observatory, and Intiwatana (stone used as a calendar, taking into account the position of the sun), and agricultural terraces.

Calca: This town is placed at the skirts of two huge mountains: Pitusiray and Sawasiray, and in and around it sit different attractions: Huchu’y Qosto or “Small Cusco” archaeological complex and two sets of springs: Machacancha (heated sulfurous waters) and Minasmoqo (cold bubbling mineral waters).

Yucay: This community has historically been seen as a very important center for irrigation technology and farming.

Urubamba: This town is in the heart of the Sacred Valley. Before the Conquest, it was an extremely important agricultural center and still today, farms forms parts of its economic base, along with tourism.

Ollantaytambo: It is called “a living Incan town” since people still follow traditions and customs passed down through the years. The archaeological complex of Ollantaytambo includes a temple, agricultural terraces and an urban sector. A short distance from Ollantaytambo

is the village of Willoc, whose inhabitants speak Quechua and dress in bright red outfits to differentiate themselves from the other peoples in the region and mark themselves as members of a single ayllu (family)

Chinchero: An attractive church built during the Colony is the highlight of this village and on the inside hang lovely paintings from the Cusco School. Yet, it is on Sundays that the action really starts to happen when area merchants and farmers assemble at the flea market to buy and sell, using the age old method of bartering for goods. Likewise, you can visit impressive archaeological remains in the area.

Maras: Something very peculiar about this town is that you can still see the original Indian aristocratic coats of arms hanging on the outside of the church and houses. It is also the starting point for visiting the nearby Maras salt flats, a view of patchwork of 3,000 wells that have been used since the Inca Empire.

Moray agricultural terraces: An impressive spectacle – a circular system of terraces, possibly used for agricultural experimentation since the concentric nature of the circles enabled its engineers to generate different temperatures and thereby reproduce all the ecological tiers found within the Incan Empire.

FROM CUSCO

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Oropesa: Traditionally called the “Land of Bread”. Its handmade ovens, centuries old, are still used on a daily basis to bake the delicious country bread called chutas in quechua.

Pikillacta: This city predates the Incas as experts’ estimate it reached its zenith somewhere between 800 A.D and 1,100AD during the time period known as the Wari regional confederation.

Andahuaylillas: The church in this village is called the “Peruvian Sistine Chapel”, a designation based upon its magnificently painted walls. Huaró: Some of the walls in this town’s church have frescos attributed to Tadeo Escalante (1803), one of the last painters of the Cusco School.

Tipón Archaeological complex: According to legend, Inca Emperor Wiracocha ordered royal gardens to be built here.

Raqchi archaeological complex: It dates back to the 15th century and considered one of the boldest of all Incan constructions. The Wiracocha Temple is by far the best part, built of adobe walls on volcanic rock foundations. The community of Raqchi is just a few minutes away and the villagers there have developed their own special form of experimental tourism.

Choquequirao archaeological complex, 150 miles from Abancay (Apurímac):

Another one of the lost cities in the Vilcabamba Valley. It was within this region that the Incas took refuge, starting in 1536 after the Spanish Conquest. It contains 9 distinct architectural groups, all made out of stone.

Machu Picchu Historic Sanctuary: World Heritage site – UNESCO and one of the New Seven Wonders.

WHAT TO BUY?

Cusco is a handicraft lover’s dream come true, with so much to choose from that it will be hard to say no to any of them, starting with

handmade clothing, pottery pieces, silver jewelry, copies of paintings from the Cusco School, wood carved statues decorated in gold leaf, religious figurines (The Three Kings, The Virgin Mary, Baby Jesus and archangels), masks, etc. The San Blas quarter is traditionally where you will find most of Cusco’s famous **artisans’ workshops**, the likes of Edilberto Merida, Antonio Olave, Jesus La Torre and Mendivil family.

WHAT TO EAT?

Since visitors from all over the world come to Cusco, food to satisfy all tastes and budgets is served there. You can find restaurants that serve traditional southern Andean dishes, like **qapchi** (potato and cheese salad) or **lawá** (a vegetable-beef soup) as well as those featuring **alpaca meat** (prized for its tenderness and low cholesterol), and restaurants that are increasingly providing specialties from the Novo-Andean style, which has prided itself on using rediscovered Andean produce, like **quinoa** (a grain) and **aguaymanto** (type of berry), in modern cooking techniques. There are plenty of Italian restaurants and other, international ones. Yet you should try one of the traditional country restaurants that offer a varied menu without losing the taste of a good home cooked meal.