

BRITISH AIRWAYS

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**HATS OFF TO
SOUTH AMERICA
THE MOST DIVERSE
CONTINENT ON EARTH**



PERU AND COLOMBIA

(LIMA—PUERTO MALDONADO—CUZCO—MACHU PICCHU—LAKE TITICACA—CARTAGENA)

THE BUDGET £3,400 PER PERSON

STYLE EMPTY NESTERS

The first time I was in Lima, the seafront – with its fog and Oasis playing on the taxi radio – rather reminded me of Scarborough. Or maybe I'd just had one pisco sour too many...

After you've landed in Lima, you can make up your own mind, but you won't have long, just one night (stay at the airport's Costa del Sol hotel) before you jet up to Puerto Maldonado the next morning – time enough for dinner, perhaps, at La Rosa Nautica in Miraflores, which I'd recommend for its ceviche alone.

Puerto Maldonado is in southeastern Peru in the Amazon forest. From here, it's 30 minutes by car, then two and a half hours by motorised canoe to the Refugio Amazonas lodge deep within pristine rainforest. The 32 rooms are open to the jungle and decorated with wood carvings representing characters from the local Ese'jeja people's traditional stories. Stay here for two nights and you'll have enough time to search for giant river otter, head off on night walks and brush up on your ornithology from the 35m tree-top canopy tower.

By upping the budget, you can swap buses for Airbuses, so next it's a flight down to Cuzco, once at the heart of the Inca empire at 3,300m above sea level. Transfer onwards to the Pakaritampu hotel in the hauntingly beautiful Sacred Valley for a couple of nights. From here you can explore the fortress at Ollantaytambo, a short walk away, go hiking, white-water rafting or mountain biking – but beware of the altitude, and take things easy.

The next day, board the train to take you to Aguas Calientes, and from there to the Inca ruins at Machu Picchu, which were discovered by American historian Hiram Bingham 100 years ago. Staying overnight at the Machu Picchu Pueblo hotel, you can nip up again the next morning before the day trippers arrive, and then you head back to Cuzco, which is said to have been founded in the 12th century, when Inca leader Manco Capac plunged his golden staff into the ground at the 'navel of the world' on the orders of the sun god Inti. The museum of pre-Columbian art is worth a look around, and you should take a taxi to the ruins at Saqsaywaman (near enough pronounced 'sexy woman') on the edge of town, before you head back to your hotel, the Casa San Blas.

When it's time to move on, catch the ten-hour train to Puno, on the shores of Lake Titicaca (the world's highest navigable lake, pub quiz fans), where women wear billowing dresses and bowler hats. Flop at the Puno Plaza hotel, and then in the morning head out to the Uros floating reed islands (touristy but unique), and Taquile island, where the locals' first language is Quechua.

The altitude of the lake area gives the air a luminescence and a clarity that makes for amazing photographs but also turns days and nights pretty cold, so finish off with a blast of warmth on the Colombian Caribbean coast at Cartagena, founded in the 16th century (Francis Drake laid siege to it in 1586).

A full day will be taken up with flights (Puno to Cartagena via Lima and Bogota with Lan and Avianca respectively, and at a cost of about £430), but later when you're promenading along Cartagena's sea walls cooled by the onshore evening breeze, you'll agree it's a fantastic place to finish your trip. And if you're worried about visiting Colombia, don't be. The tourist

board's latest slogan – 'the only risk is wanting to stay' – pretty neatly sums up the situation.

Stay three nights at the 16-room Hotel Casa India Catalina, from where you can amble around the cobbled streets, head off to nearby beaches, shop at local designer stores, or eat and drink way too much before your flight home from Bogota – try Café Santissimo, which has a small dance floor and a courtyard open to the stars.

NEED TO KNOW

- For a two-week trip similar to this, budget around £3,400 per person for Iberia/BA flights from Heathrow via Madrid to Lima, and back from Bogota, hotel accommodation, most meals and excursions.
- If you'd rather let someone else do the planning, try Last Frontiers travel (+44 (0)1296 653 000, lastfrontiers.com).
- Also see peru.info and colombia.travel.

WHERE TO STAY

Costa del Sol Doubles from £120 a night.

+ 51 1 711 2000, costadelsolperu.com

Refugio Amazonas Doubles from £440 a night.

+ 51 1 9 9351 2265, perunature.com

Pakaritampu Hotel Doubles from £100 a night.

+ 51 84 20 4020, pakaritampu.com

Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel Doubles from £130 a night.

+51 1 610 0400, inkaterra.com.pe

Casa San Blas Doubles from £130 a night.

+ 51 84 25 1563, casasanblas.com

Puno Plaza Hotel Doubles from £60 a night.

+ 51 5 135 1424, punoplazahotel.com

Hotel Casa India Catalina Doubles from £160 a night.

+ 57 5 664 4361, hotelcasaindiacatalina.com >

