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ROAD TRIP

# Peru's True North

Along the Pan-American Highway lies an undiscovered coastal region where colonial cities and ancient pyramid complexes live in harmony with laid-back beach towns and stylish inns.

Nicholas Gill goes exploring. PHOTOGRAPHS BY JOÃO CANZIANI

*Caballitos de totora,*  
handmade reed rafts used by  
fishermen in Huanchaco.



**WHEN WELL-TO-DO LIMEÑOS** escape the city, they don't head inland, to the Sacred Valley. Rather, they go up the coast between the cities of Trujillo and Máncora, where a languid day might include kitesurfing, yoga, and cocktails by the sea, as well as taking in the region's ancient adobe cities and pyramid complexes. To experience this contrast of old and new, I set off in a beat-up Toyota Yaris on the Pan-American Highway, going 373 miles from the beach town of Máncora to the colonial city of Trujillo.



Máncora's Pocitas Beach.



## MÁNCORA

Day 1, evening |

### A walk on the beach

After a happy-hour passion-fruit pisco sour at the sleek, beachfront Hotel DCO ([hoteldco.com](http://hoteldco.com)), I left the young, wealthy Limeños behind and strolled along Pocitas Beach. My destination was the new KiChic ([kichic.com](http://kichic.com); doubles from \$250), a nine-room, wellness-themed property that is as far from civilization as you can get.



## EL ÑURO

Day 2, dawn |

### Gone fishing

The owner of La Sirena d'Juan (316 Avda. Piura; entrées \$11–\$14), a restaurant in Máncora, offered to show me where he gets his tuna. El Nuro, 23 minutes away, is a speck of a village. Standing on the pier watching sea turtles waiting to catch scraps from fishermen, I found it hard to believe that a luxe resort from eco-hotelier Inkaterria was in the works in nearby Cabo Blanco.

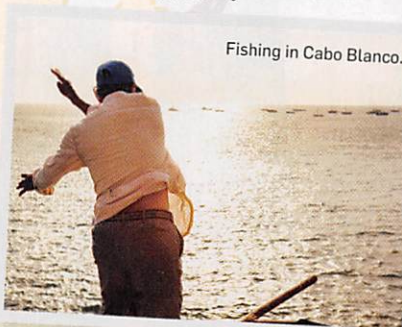


Máncora

El Ñuro

Talara Airport

Fishing in Cabo Blanco.



## TÚCUME

Day 3, early afternoon |

### Pyramid scheme

The best way to appreciate this 543-acre site—built by the Sicán people in the 11th century—is from above, which is why I climbed up El Purgatorio hill. From that rocky vantage point, I could see all 26 adobe structures, many of which are badly deteriorated. (Thor Heyerdahl, of *Kon-Tiki* fame, was the first to work on the site, in 1988.)



A street market in Catacaos.

Catacaos

## CATACAOS

Day 2, late morning |

### Chicha break

Peruvians from all over visit this town to load up on silver jewelry and ceramic figurines. It's also known for its *chicherías*, which sell beer made of fermented maize. I looked for ones flying a white flag, which means *chicha* is available—but I could only stomach a few sips of the yeasty drink.



Túcume  
(ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITE)



The pyramids of Túcume.





## FERREÑAFE

Day 3, late lunch |

### Feeding frenzy

I couldn't decide among the no-frills *picanterías*, so it was a two-lunch kind of day. At Angelyna Martha (Avda. Peru; entrées \$10–\$15), I dodged a crazy rooster in the courtyard before ordering the *causa ferreñafana*, a whole fish on a bed of potatoes in a spicy sauce. Then it was dehydrated beef, onions, and a side of canary beans cooked in pork fat at Rosita Inga (625 Avda. Tacna; entrées \$8–\$13).

Túcume

Ferreñafe

Chiclayo



PAN-AMERICAN HWY

El Brujo

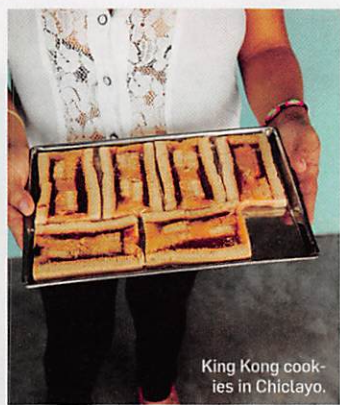


Huanchaco Beach

Trujillo



Lima



King Kong cookies in Chiclayo.

## CHICLAYO

Day 4, morning |

### Sweets stop

Chiclayo is the gateway to the ancient sites of Túcume, Sicán, and Sipán, but I kept noticing something more modern: King Kong. The name was plastered on dozens of storefronts, advertising an oversize cookie sandwich with layers of pineapple jam, peanut butter, and *manjar blanco*, the Peruvian *dulce de leche*. At the candy shop San Roque ([sanroque.com.pe](http://sanroque.com.pe)), I opted instead for coconut balls and marzipan-like *maná*.

Fishermen in Huanchaco.



## HUANCHACO BEACH

Day 5, early morning |

### Gone fishing—again

At the 123-year-old wooden pier I bought a fishing spool—a flat piece of wood with a line, hook, and tiny weight—but got no bites. On the water, fishermen straddled their *caballitos de totora*. A precursor to surfboards, these handwoven reed rafts have been used for around 3,000 years.

El Brujo archaeological complex.



## EL BRUJO

Day 4, afternoon |

### Canine encounter

Every ancient site on the coast should have a sign that reads BEWARE THE PERUVIAN HAIRLESS DOG. More than a millennium ago, the Moche civilization used these ugly-cute animals—black, leathery skin, crooked teeth, and a whiplike tail—to guard tombs. One stood sentry at this vast complex, where in 2006 a tattooed mummy named the Lady of Cao was found in a burial chamber.



Casa Urquiaga, in Trujillo.

## TRUJILLO

Day 5, late afternoon |

### Colonial tour

I checked in to the elegant Libertador Trujillo ([libertador.com.pe](http://libertador.com.pe); doubles from \$115), the recent recipient of a major renovation, then went wandering. With its spectacular Spanish mansions, Trujillo looks frozen in 1534, its founding year. At the sky-blue Casa Urquiaga (446 Jirón Francisco Pizarro), a museum of sorts, I admired Moche ceramics—a testament to how much history has unfolded along the coast. +