

# QUOTE

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by Keith Flanagan

# CONDÉ NAST Traveler

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## What to Know Before Booking Your Trip to Machu Picchu

*Written by Keith Flanagan - January 29, 2016*



Courtesy Explora Valle Sagrado  
Hiking Machu Picchu by way of El Valle Sagrado.

## **New openings in the Sacred Valley provide an alternative to the well-trod Inca Trail.**

What, you still haven't been to Machu Picchu? Now's the time: Permits went on sale this week to hike the Inca Trail (only 200 are available daily for tourists), and registered guides are filling up with bookings. The ancient site, too, has also [recently been deemed "endangered" by UNESCO](#), which means you should get in while you can.

The heavy logistics and high-demand of the Inca Trail require advance booking and months of planning—not exactly every traveler's cup of coca leaf tea. Instead, new openings make room for an alternative, luxurious route by way of El Valle Sagrado—The Sacred Valley—which sits some nine miles north of Cusco.

**Here are five ways to make the most of your trip to Peru:**

### **1. Start lower**

Most itineraries to Machu Picchu begin with several days in Cusco, clocking in at 11,000 feet above sea level. But Machu Picchu rests at 7,972 feet, and altitude sickness takes effect at 8,000 feet. Instead of starting sickeningly high in Cusco, the nearby Sacred Valley lies lower, letting you acclimate gradually. Even better? The region was the heartland of the Incan Empire and is still home to ancient sites, charming villages, and flora- and fauna-rich microclimates.

### **2. Take a break**

Until recently, only rustic hotels called the Sacred Valley home. But this past year, [Inkaterra](#), which operates some of the best properties throughout Peru, put the finishing touches on [Hacienda Urubamba](#). The property allows a brief pause in the Sacred Valley on the way to Machu Picchu, plus perks worth staying for: estate-grown ingredients in its restaurant, twilight mountain excursions, and curated cultural experiences (like crafting Andean corn beer on property).

### **3. Be adventurous**

The new Skylodge Adventure Suites [cling to cliffsides nearby](#), while Explora Valle Sagrado, a new property from the South American luxury adventure travel company (located on an ancient corn plantation), is taking its first bookings in July.





*Courtesy Inkaterra /Inkaterra's Hacienda Urubamba*

## 4. Lose the crowds

On the fringe of the Sacred Valley is the less-frequented Ollantaytambo Station. Most travelers arrive at the foot of Machu Picchu by trains departing from outside of Cusco, but from Ollantaytambo they can board Inca Rail, an upscale direct train that winds through the same lush landscapes for lower prices—and with lesser crowds.

## 5. Follow the experts

Tour operators, too, are setting their sights on the Sacred Valley. Chief among them? The classic travel company, [Cox & Kings](#), just launched lodge-to-lodge treks through the Sacred Valley, straight to those mystifying, clouded ruins.

Link to story: <http://www.cntraveler.com/stories/2016-01-29/what-to-know-before-booking-your-trip-to-machu-picchu>