

Top 5 Places to Visit in Peru

Let's get to it: Peru is the place to be.



The summit (16,500 feet) of the Vinicuna, or Rainbow mountain.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JESS MANDIA



By **Caity Garvey**
Photographs by **Jess Mandia**



Peru is a destination that begs to be explored. In this vast and storied land, ancient, colonial, and modern traditions meld together for an unforgettable cultural experience. No matter the type of traveler—history buff, adventurer, or foodie—Peru offers a myriad of activities to satisfy every appetite. It’s no surprise that its ancient sites, beautiful topography, and diverse ecosystem attract visitors from all over the world, making it one of the most popular destinations in South America.

LIMA



Blossoms outside the grand Museo Larco in Lima, Peru.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JESS MANDIA

Known as the City of the Kings, Lima is Peru’s capital city and a symbol of its Spanish colonial history, industry, and independence.

First-time visitors should **check out** the local museums and get a taste for Peru’s depth of history. [Museo Larco](#) has an ancient collection of pre-Columbian exhibits of Peru’s indigenous people, where guests can also enjoy beautiful gardens and an on-site [restaurant](#).

There’s no better way to **enjoy the coastal views** of Lima than in the lush neighborhood of [Miraflores](#). Stroll through [Parque del Amor](#), which offers spectacular views of the Pacific Ocean, or head to the ancient clay pyramid of [Huaca Pucllana](#) for a dose of history. You can visit during the day or at night when lights make it a sight to behold. If you need to get some shopping in, the [Larcomar](#) is the place.



Left: Moche ceramics are made from red and cream clays and often finished with bone tools. **Right:** Chancay pottery is usually used for tomb decoration.
PHOTOGRAPH BY JESS MANDIA

If you have some extra time and money, consider a **food tour** while in Lima. The [Lima Gourmet Company](#) offers morning and evening tours for about \$130. Looking for something cheaper? [Haku Tours](#) offers a wide variety of group outings not just limited to food. It’s also a perfect way to meet fellow travelers.

CUSCO




PLAZA DE ARMAS People enjoy Cusco's main square, the Plaza de Armas, at night.
Video by Caity Garvey

Lima may hold the title as the official capital of Peru, but [Cusco](#) is the original seat of power for the Inca empire. Declared a World Heritage Site by UNESCO in 1983, it is apparent why it deserves that title.

Cusco is a beautiful city. From its Inca and 16th century colonial architecture, to its narrow, winding streets, the city has a romantic vibe with a distinct European feel. While there are many **places to stay**, [Inkaterra La Casona](#) is a standout. The 16th century manor house was restored into a 11 suite boutique hotel situated in the historic Plaza de las Nazarenas. Cozy features, traditional Incan and Spanish décor, and a central open courtyard make for an unforgettable stay.

FEATURED NATIONAL
GEOGRAPHIC TRIP



Check Out Our Trips to South
America

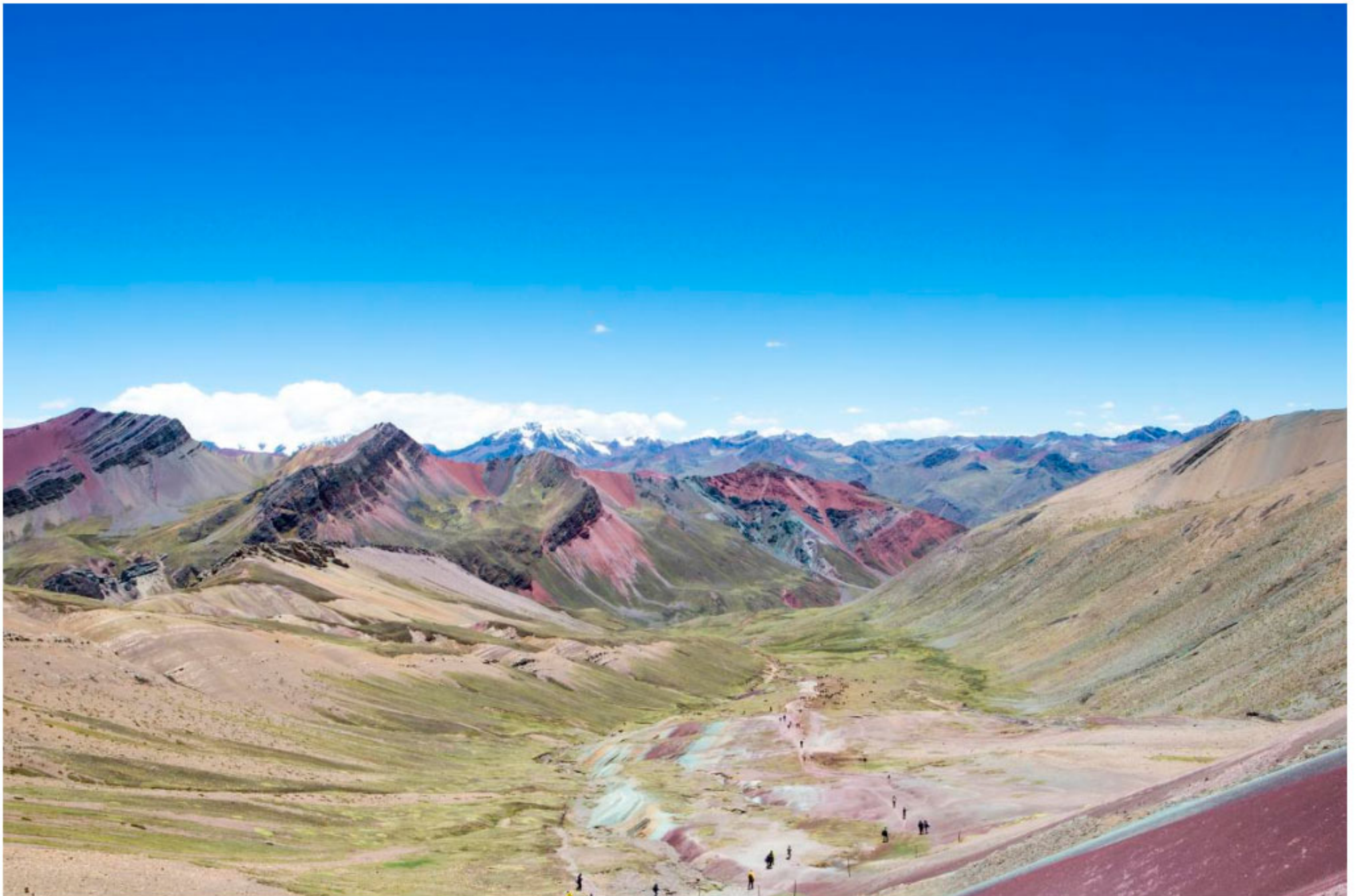


A llama poses in Cusco, Peru.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JESS MANDIA

Cusco's main square, the Plaza de Armas, is perhaps the city's **most iconic site** and a prime spot for a leisurely stroll and people-watching. The square is also surrounded by many eclectic shops and restaurants. The awe-inspiring Cusco Cathedral sits on periphery of the square and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Archeological relics, artifacts, and colonial works of art are displayed within.

After a long day of touring the city stop at the Museo del Pisco, which offers cocktail classes and flight tastings of pisco, a distinctly Peruvian aperitif. Sit back and enjoy the scenery.



View from the top of Rainbow Mountain, outside the city limits of Cusco.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JESS MANDIA

If you have the time, there is an all-day excursion from Cusco to the famous Rainbow Mountain (also known as Vinicuna). The elevation is high, so you need to take that into consideration for the hike. It is definitely worth the trip as the site is stunning!

THE SACRED VALLEY OF THE INCAS



Farmers tend crops at the Inkaterra Hacienda Urubamba in the Sacred Valley. Hacienda Urubamba provides work for locals and uses produce from their garden on their menu.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JESS MANDIA

The [Sacred Valley](#), also known as Urubamba Valley, is a prime destination for exploring Inca ruins and enjoying outdoor activities. You can easily make day trips to this region from Cusco or Machu Picchu, but **consider staying a night or two** at [Inkaterra Hacienda Urubamba](#) to explore the region. The hacienda-style hotel is nestled in the center of the Sacred Valley and includes multiple excursions with your stay. Guests can choose from several hikes that vary in activity level, and tour the on-site ecological farm that supports the farm-to-table cuisine served at the hotel.



CORN FIELDS IN THE SACRED VALLEY Corn is an important crop in Peruvian culture, from the time of the Incas to modern day.

Video by Caity Garvey

You can **book adventure tours** for mountain biking, horseback riding, hiking, and rafting with agencies throughout the region. [KB Tambo Tours](#) are well priced and can accommodate various activity levels.

There are **several breathtaking locations to explore** in the Sacred Valley before making your journey to Machu Picchu. The [Salinas de Maras](#) is a network of nearly 3,000 salt pans that are filled by an underground spring. The terraced ponds are a beautiful sight and worth the trip. Just 3 miles away is the ancient site of Moray. The deep, bowl-like impressions in the Earth (about 100 feet) are believed to have served as an Incan agricultural laboratory. Your last stop should be the town of [Ollantaytambo](#), home to an Incan fortress with large stone terraces built into the hillside. It is also a common starting point for the [Inca Trail](#), a hiking route to Machu Picchu.

MACHU PICCHU



Clouds scatter across a sprawling panoramic view of Peru's famed Machu Picchu.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JESS MANDIA

This seminal destination is probably what drives most people to visit Peru. Considered one of the new 7 Wonders of the World (alongside heavy hitters such as the Great Wall of China and the Roman Colosseum) [Machu Picchu](#) doesn't disappoint.

One of the **most memorable ways** to get to [Machu Picchu](#) is via the [Inca Rail](#), which departs from Cusco or Ollantaytambo. The rail journey transports passengers through the spectacular views of the Sacred Valley's countryside. Besides, who doesn't love a majestic train ride?

To visit Machu Picchu you need to **buy your ticket in advance of your trip**. To help regulate the amount of people who visit the site each day, there are a limited number of tickets available. You can purchase them online at the [Ministerio de Cultura's](#) webpage. The ticket purchasing site is only available in Spanish, so follow [this guide](#).

The weather here can be temperamental—sunny and warm one moment and gray and raining the next. Be sure to dress in layers, pack light, and bring waterproof jackets and gear. Enjoy the view and the few native llamas and alpacas that call Machu Picchu their home!



Orchid hunting in the cloud forest of Machu Picchu.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JESS MANDIA



A **great place to stay** is the [Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel](#), which is situated in the cloud forests at the base of the Incan citadel. This natural wonderland is home to over 200 bird species unique to the region and over 300 species of orchid that grow among the winding stone pathways to the guest rooms.

THE AMAZON

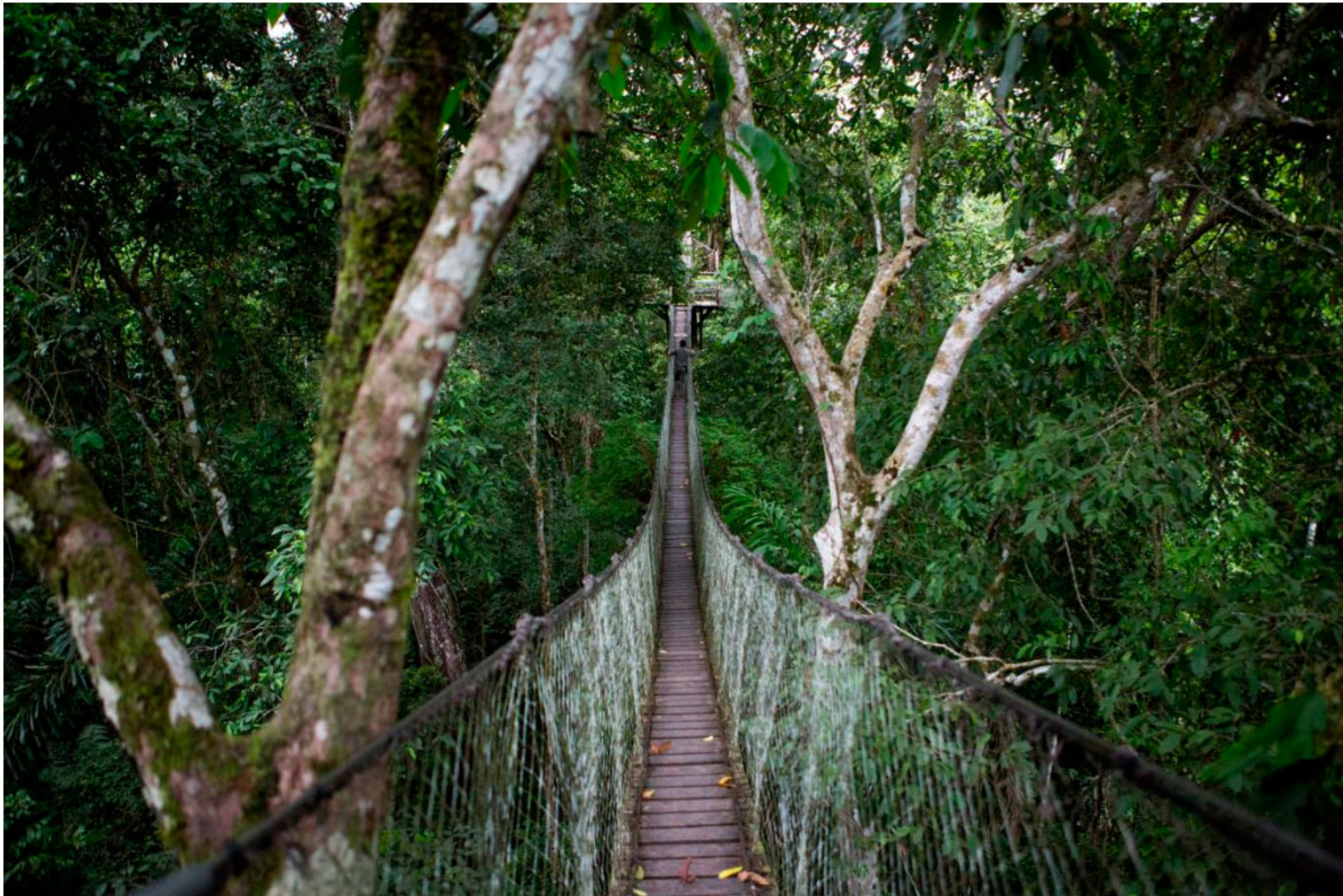


AMAZON WATERWAYS Canoes are the main way to navigate the winding waterways of the Amazon.

Videos by Caity Garvey and Jess Mandia

The [Peruvian Amazon](#) covers about 60% of the country and is one of the most biologically diverse areas in the world. Get ready to get up close and personal with wildlife and creepy crawlers! Fun fact: the notorious anaconda calls these lands its home.

One of the **easiest ways to get to the Amazon** is by plane from Cusco to Puerto Maldonado—a quick, 50-minute flight. Book your stay at [Inkaterra Hacienda Concepción](#), an eco-friendly [National Geographic Unique Lodge](#) that offers an impressive array of tours.



One of the excursions offered by Hacienda Concepción is a canopy walk among the treetops of the Amazon.

PHOTOGRAPH BY JESS MANDIA

One **standout experience** offered to guests is a visit to Lake Sandoval, home to river otters, caimans, and howler monkeys—to name a few. Other not-to-miss adventures are the guided night walk through the Amazon jungle (you'll be seeing a potential variety of creepy to cute; tarantulas to kinkajous), the twilight river excursion, and the not-for-the-faint-of-heart canopy walk.

