

NEWS

12 Reasons You Should Go to Peru Now

by Eric Rosen

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Though [Lima](#) has been on foodies' short list of delicious destinations for a few years now, and [Machu Picchu](#) remains one of the wonders of the world, Peru has so much more to offer than just a few hot restaurants and well-trod tourist attractions. With landscapes ranging from hidden high-altitude hamlets in the Andes to primordial Amazonian marshes, and enormous sunny beaches to charming colonial towns, not to mention some exciting travel and tourism developments, Peru has quietly transitioned from a top South American travel hotspot to one of the world's most exciting destinations. Here's why you need to go there now.

1. It's Easier to Get to (and Around) Than Ever

Thanks to the fact that [Peru](#) was one of LAN's home territories, the airline has offered flight connections from several US destinations to its hub in Lima for several years now. Thanks to its recent merger with TAM, though, the airline now connects travelers to even more cities throughout South America. These days, LATAM flies from Lima to Los Angeles (LAX), Miami (MIA), New York (JFK) and Washington, D.C. (IAD) and partners with American Airlines through the Oneworld alliance, so you can use your AAdvantage miles to fly there. You'll need 20,000 or 30,000 miles each way to fly economy or business class respectively from the continental US to Peru. Within Peru, you can book awards for 10,000 miles each way in economy or 20,000 miles in business class.

American also flies to Lima via [Miami](#) (MIA) and Dallas (DFW) — award rates are the same for economy and business class. AA, however, offers off-peak economy awards on its own flights to the South America 1 region from January 16 to June 14 and

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September 7 to November 14, and over those dates, awards will start at just 17,500 miles each way. You can also catch flights on Delta via Atlanta (ATL) and United via Houston (IAH) or Newark (EWR).

Once you get to Peru, flights are relatively inexpensive and frequent between the major cities, including Lima, Cusco, Arequipa, Iquitos and Puerto Maldonado on a number of airlines that include LATAM as well as Star Alliance carrier [Avianca](#) (though some of the planes are still labeled TACA) and upstarts like Peruvian Airlines.



There are more ways to get to (and around) Peru than ever, including on LATAM.

2. Peruvian Is the New Nordic Cuisine

It seems like much of the world discovered ceviche about five years ago, and since then, Peruvian cuisine has become one of the touchstones of international fine dining, with restaurants popping up from [London](#) to [Los Angeles](#) and [Seattle](#) to [Singapore](#). Much of the initial fervor could be attributed to the success of Peruvian uber-restaurateur and cookbook author Gastón Acurio, whose restaurants include Astrid y Gastón and La Mar Cebichería, of which there is an outpost in [San Francisco](#).



Peruvian food (especially ceviche) is gaining a following around the world.

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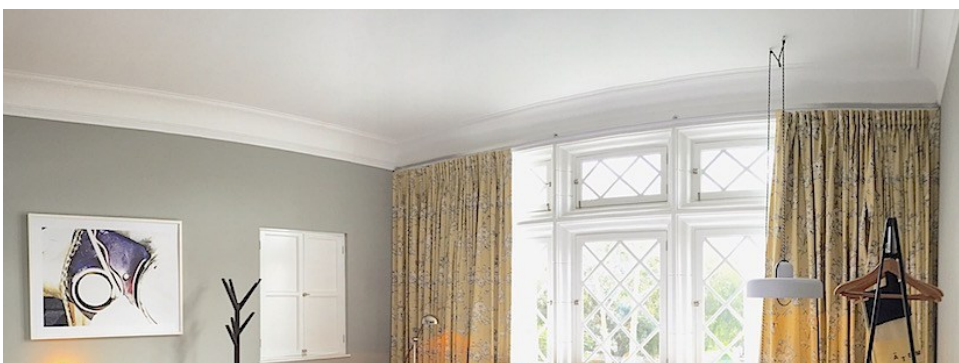
Since then, other young chefs have taken up the cause and made names for themselves championing not only Peru's bounteous seafood, but also the nation's diverse culinary roots, which range from traditional Andean crops to Amazonian fish and fruits and blend in international influences as far-flung as Asia and Africa. Today, Lima is a hotbed of edible invention delectably on display in restaurants like chef Virgilio Martinez Véliz's Central; Ámaz and Malabar, where chef Pedro Miguel Schiaffino creatively showcases jungle-sourced ingredients; and Maido, whose chef, Mitsuharu Tsumura, is one of the forerunners of Japanese-inflected Nikkei cuisine. And that's just what's happening in Lima!



Amazonian snails (and pisco cocktails) on order at Ámaz.

3. Lima Is Worth a Stop

Speaking of Lima, the capital is experiencing a new moment of growth and excitement. Before, many visitors spent a single night there upon arrival or departure because of inconvenient flight times. These days, the city is a destination unto itself, thanks to a crop of interesting new hotels, restaurants and museums. Though you'll find no shortage of points properties like the JW Marriott in Miraflores, or the Westin in San Isidro, there are exciting new boutique hotels, as well. Hotelito Atemporal is an under-the-radar hipster hideaway with just nine rooms and a bucolic back garden where breakfast is served, housed in a historic mansion dating to the 1940s. The staff can steer you toward everything from the hottest new bar in town to the perfect café for making new friends or getting a little work done. There are also loaner bikes to get out and explore the neighborhood. Hotel B in Barranco is another bohemian gem (this one's in a 1914 mansion) with a great bar scene.



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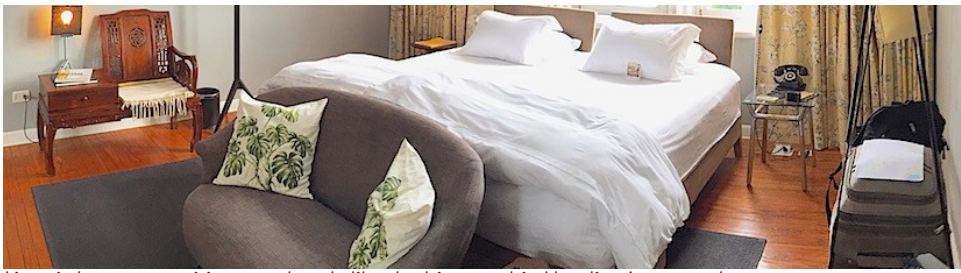
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Lima is home to exciting new hotels like the hipster-chic Hotelito Atemporal.

As for sights, you'll still find the 1,800-year-old ruins of Huaca Pucllana in the heart of the city, and can learn about the cultures that populated pre-Columbian Peru — and their erotic pottery! — at the beautifully curated Larco Museum. The colonial section of town is anchored by the Plaza de Armas, around which sits the Palacio de Gobierno and the Cathedral. Take time to stroll the spooky catacombs beneath the Monastery of San Francisco, too.



Don't skip the erotic ceramics exhibit at the Museo Larco.

For a little more fun, head to the lively seaside Barranco district, where you'll find Mate, the small but fascinating Mario Testino Museum, home to exhibits of the famous photographer's works. Next door, the Pedro de Osma Museum houses colonial art in a stately mansion with beautiful gardens.



Mate is the new[ish] Mario Testino museum in Barranco.

Stop for a meal — and get ready to share, because the plates are huge — at Isolina Taberna Peruana, but save room for a scoop (or three) of gelato at Blu, which is routinely voted the best ice cream in town. Enjoy it as you stroll down the Bajada de Baños under the famous Puente de los Suspiros (or Bridge of Sighs) toward the Pacific.



You might have to wait for a table at Isolina, but it's worth it.

4. Mysterious Machu Picchu

No visit to Peru would be complete without at least a quick day trip to [Machu Picchu](#) from Cusco. Or, as an alternative for all the adventurers and budget travelers out there, you can spend four days hiking about 26 miles of the Inca Trail and arrive at Machu Picchu via the Sun Gate just in time for a dramatic sunrise above the ruined city.



You can't come to Peru and not visit Machu Picchu.

You can make the journey there and back in a day [from the city of Cusco on PeruRail](#) and a bus or taxi, but if you have more time, make it an overnight trip. In fact, I'd suggest coming straight here from Lima instead of stopping to acclimate in Cusco and spending a night or two there first. That should help because Cusco is 3,400 meters (11,150 feet) above sea level while Machu Picchu is at about 2,400 meters (7,900

feet). Not only that, but if you stay overnight close to Machu Picchu, you'll also beat the day-trip crowds up to the ruins first thing in the morning before sunrise, and won't have to worry as much about the huge lines that form to catch the shuttle buses from the town of Aguas Calientes up to the gates of the park on the mountain.



Peru Rail has several affordable options for getting from Cusco to Machu Picchu.

Known as the lost city of the Inca because it was one of the empire's last strongholds after the Spanish invasion and was hidden in the jungle for centuries, the centuries-old citadel has become one of the world's most famous tourist attractions. A day ticket will cost you 152 Peruvian Sol (about \$46), and guides are easy to arrange. Though the town of Aguas Calientes is still something of a backpacker hangout, there are some luxurious but budget-friendly options there as well, including the Sumaq Hotel, where you can hear the roar of the Urubamba River from your room, and a culinary program that focuses on local, seasonal ingredients like ceviche made with fresh mountain trout and desserts created with jungle fruits like *maracuya* and *lúcuma*.



Consider an overnight stay near Machu Picchu. There are plenty of options, like the elegant Sumaq Hotel in Aguas Calientes.

5. Culture and Crafts in the Sacred Valley

When not lounging in a casita perched on the mountainside with postcard-perfect

views of the valley from its wraparound windows, venture out and explore the ancient communities of the surrounding valleys and mountain passes through a variety of excursions. One day, you might visit the ruins at Picas, while on another you can learn about traditional weaving techniques and even purchase fair-trade handmade alpaca apparel and decoratives at Centro Textil Urpi Centro Cultural Parwa for a fraction of the cost you'd pay in Cusco or Lima.



Spend a few days in the Sacred Valley learning about traditional Andean cultures and crafts, like weaving.

You might be in a rush to get back to Cusco, but it would be a shame to miss out on [a few days in the Sacred Valley](#), which lies along the Urubamba River between Cusco and Machu Picchu. A spate of new lodges has opened there in recent years, including the luxe Inkaterra Hacienda Urubamba.



There are some fabulous lodges in the Sacred Valley, including the Inkaterra Hacienda Urubamba, which opened in 2015. Image courtesy of Inkaterra.

You can also marvel at the enormous Incan crop terraces at Moray and buy artisanal pink salt straight from the source at the ancient mines of Maras. Then head back to the hotel for an evening of stargazing and storytelling before pisco sours in front of the fire and a dinner of dishes like guinea pig confit over beets and sticky rice.





The crop terraces at Moray make for a fascinating stop in the Sacred Valley.

6. High-Altitude History in Cusco

Once you've acclimated to the thin air, it's time to hit the former Incan imperial capital of Cusco, whose original streets were laid out to resemble the shape of a jaguar. Get the lay of the land at the central Plaza de Armas, check out the massive cathedral, and pay your respects to the mummies at the Museo Inka. Then make a stop at Coricancha, the Temple of the Sun, which was once the city's religious center and covered in pure gold plating before it was looted by the Spaniards. The hilly, bohemian San Blas district is also worth a walk for its cute little shops and cafes and sweeping views of the city. Cusco has no shortage of lovely hotels — including the grande dame Hotel Monasterio — but for something a little more intimate, try Belmond's newer property next door, the Palacio Nazarenas.



Cusco's Plaza de Armas at night. Image courtesy of Getty Images.

7. Buenos Beaches

It might surprise you to learn that Peru has phenomenal beaches in its arid northwest. Mancora has developed a cult following among surfers, while folks with a more historic bent might like to make the colonial town of Trujillo their base for exploring the region, including the beach resort town of Huanchaco.





Mancora has become one of Peru's top surf destinations. Image courtesy of Getty Images.

8. Enigmatic Nazca

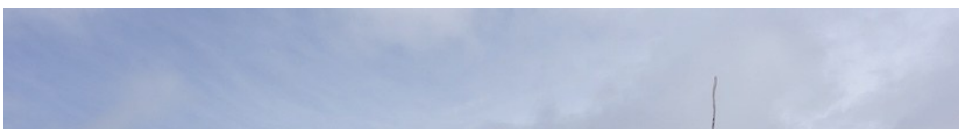
What's a trip without a little mysticism? About 250 miles south of Lima lies the dry and dusty Nazca Desert, stretching between the towns of Nazca and Palpa. Visitors come here to take scenic flights over the plateau to see the enormous geoglyphs, or land drawings, that archaeologists believe were created by the local Nazca people between about 500 BCE and 700 CE. The shapes include animals like birds and monkeys as well as human figures, some of which stretch over 1,000 feet, and many of which have been nearly perfectly preserved, thanks to the climate.



Take a scenic flight over Nazca to see the enormous geoglyphs drawn into the landscape. Image courtesy of Getty Images.

9. Lovely Lake Titicaca

Even the name sounds exotic: Titicaca. And then it sounds a little dirty. But immature amusement aside, Lake Titicaca has become more and more of a draw in recent years, and for good reason. The world's highest navigable lake is also a stronghold of indigenous Quechua and Aymara culture.





Visit the floating islands of Lake Titicaca.

The region's colorful capital of Puno radiates out from the lakeshore and offers plenty of budget accommodations. But if you're looking for something a little more luxurious, Relais & Chateaux's Titilaka is about a half-hour outside the city on a secluded peninsula surrounded by little farming villages. Excursions and meals are built into the stay, and include activities like hikes and bike rides to pre-Columbian settlements and colonial towns and paddling through the marshes learning about the local birdlife. The signature experience, though, is a day out on the water on the lodge's private yacht visiting the famous floating islands of the Uros people and hiking one of the actual islands, Taquile.



Locals take a break for lunch on Taquile Island.

After meeting the local inhabitants and learning about their way of life and traditional handicrafts, enjoy a gourmet lunch of dishes like lake trout with Andean mint and quinoa soup with farm-grown vegetables, all with panoramic views of the lake.





A lunch of local staples on Taquile Island, courtesy of Titilaka.

10. Get Your Adrenaline Fix in Arequipa

Also down in the south just a few hours' drive from Puno, the city of Arequipa is a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage site thanks to its unique white volcanic stone architecture.



The town of Arequipa is UNESCO-listed for its distinctive white volcanic stone architecture. Image courtesy of Getty Images.

The surrounding region is also called Arequipa, and is known for high-octane thrills like whitewater rafting, trekking and mountain biking around the Colca Canyon, one of the world's deepest.



You can also go whitewater rafting and trekking through Colca Canyon. Image courtesy of Getty Images.

11. Amazon Adventures

The Amazon is home to a new breed of river cruises that emphasize adventure, activity and wildlife over sedate socializing — it's sort of like a safari on the water. Aqua Expeditions pioneered luxury river cruising here and now operates its 16-suite Amazon Aria vessel on the river and its tributaries. The rooms were designed by star Peruvian architect, Jordi Puig, and all have floor-to-ceiling windows for prime river views. But on the upper decks you'll also find a shop and dining room, a living room and bar, a sun deck with a plunge pool, and even a spa. During the day, the crew takes guests out in smaller craft to explore the channels of the enormous, unspoiled Pacaya Samiria Reserve, where you might spot pink river dolphins, monkeys, sloths, anacondas and crocodile-like caimans. If you're lucky, you might even come across manatees, capybaras or even a jaguar.



Aqua Expeditions' luxurious Amazon Aria vessel. Image courtesy of Aqua Expeditions.

Cruises also include village visits where you might get to play with local schoolchildren — be sure to pack school supplies to bring as gifts — go out in a dugout canoe for a paddle with the local ladies or even fish for piranha.



You'll spot wildlife like sloths in the Amazon. Image courtesy of Aqua Expeditions.

While the river cruises tend to be based near Iquitos in the north, you can also fly to Puerto Maldonado, which is the gateway to the southern Amazon and the capital of the Madre de Dios region. From there, you can explore the Tambopata National Reserve and stay at fabulous lodges like Inkaterre's Reserva Amazónica, which has a stunning canopy walkway, and Hacienda Concepción, which takes guests to a lake that's home to the Amazon's famous giant river otters.



Take a dip in the Amazon to cool off.

12. Perfect Pisco Sours

I'll save the best, and shortest, for last. When you come to a country that has a national cocktail, you've got to try it. A lot. And you'll have plenty of opportunities to taste Peru's national libation, the pisco sour, since variations of it will be offered to you at every turn. Take the opportunity to perfect your own recipe and pick a preferred pisco, which is a brandy made from any of eight grapes (though the best tend to be made mostly from quebranta grapes). Then sneak a few bottles back with you in your suitcase.



Learn how to make the perfect pisco sour during your trip.

Bottom Line

Between all the exciting restaurants, ancient cultures, world-class hotels, breathtaking landscapes and awe-inspiring wildlife, Peru has so much to offer travelers. The only hard part is carving out enough time to explore it all.

What are some of your favorite things to do in Peru? Let us know, below.

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