




ARTS &amp; CULTURE Jul 20, 2017

## Sacred Valley, Peru: How to Plan the Perfect Trip



SARAH SCHLICHTER



Exploring Peru's Sacred Valley of the Incas feels  [Save This Story](#)  
like going back in time. Centuries-old Inca terraces spill down green, misty hillsides. Women in traditional Andean dress stroll along the cobblestone streets of colonial towns, long black braids trailing down their backs. Colorful village markets display soft alpaca sweaters, hats, and ponchos woven by hand.

The Sacred Valley is tucked between Cusco and Machu Picchu, running along the Urubamba River from Pisac to Ollantaytambo. Travelers with limited time often skip the Sacred Valley in their rush to see Machu Picchu, but the valley's picturesque towns and well-preserved Inca ruins are worth a day or two in their own right.

The Sacred Valley has an additional benefit for travelers hoping to acclimate to the region's altitude before visiting Machu Picchu: Most of the valley sits several hundred feet lower than Cusco.

### When to Visit the Sacred Valley

For the best chance of dry weather, visit the Sacred Valley

during its high season between June and August. The rainiest part of the year is November through March. Come during the shoulder-season months—April, May, September, and October—for slightly smaller crowds and lower prices than you'd find in high season, without an excessive threat of rain.

## Top Sights in the Sacred Valley

**Pisac:** Famous for its Sunday market, in which farmers come from all over the Sacred Valley with a colorful bounty of local fruit and vegetables, Pisac is also worth a visit for its large Inca ruins. Located above the town via a zigzagging road, the agricultural terraces and stone ruins offer sweeping views of the valley below.

**Ollantaytambo:** Aside from its cobblestone streets and friendly cafes, Ollantaytambo's primary attraction is the Inca fortress located right at the edge of town. Though these ruins are more compact than those in Pisac, be prepared for some climbing; the terraces and temples were built into a steep hillside.

**Chincho:** In this small town, you can take in a traditional weaving demonstration, visit a pretty colonial-era church, and explore Inca terraces. Chincho also has a Sunday market.

**Maras:** This town is home to two of the Sacred Valley's most distinctive attractions: a patchwork of hillside geometric salt pools that have been used to mine salt for centuries, and an Inca site called Moray, where the concentric terraces look like a giant green amphitheater.

> RELATED: [Machu Picchu Is Overrated, Go to Choquequirao Instead](#)

## Getting There and Around

The nearest major city to the Sacred Valley is Cusco; most international travelers arrive by air via Lima. Once in Cusco, there are a variety of ways to get to the Sacred Valley. While cheap public buses operate in the area, most tourists find it safer and more comfortable to take a taxi or arrange a private transfer through a hotel. Another option: Shared taxis, or *colectivos*, carry up to four passengers and connect major towns in the area.

You can rent a car at the Cusco airport, but the [U.S. State Department](#) cautions against driving yourself at night or in rural areas in Peru, thanks to poor signage and sometimes

dangerous roads. Instead, many travelers join local tours (see below) or hire a driver to take them around the Sacred Valley. Your hotel can help you find a driver and English-speaking guide.

> RELATED: [Getting Around Peru: Transportation Tips](#)

## Sacred Valley Tours

For travelers with limited time, the easiest way to explore the Sacred Valley is to take a group tour from Cusco. Full-day tours—such as [this tour](#) from SmarterTravel's sister site, Viator—typically stop in Pisac (including the market and ruins) as well as Ollantaytambo. Other tours include Chinchero and/or Moray and the Maras salt flats. For a more active day, you can even go [biking](#) or [horseback riding](#) in the valley.

There are also two-day tours that include one day in the Sacred Valley and one at Machu Picchu, such as [this Viator offering](#).

Dozens of tour companies in Cusco run Sacred Valley tours. A couple of reputable options include [Llama Path](#) and [Alpaca Expeditions](#).

When choosing a tour, take a look at the size of the group and the number of sites the itinerary includes. Some travelers want to squeeze as much sightseeing as they can into a single day, while others prefer a more leisurely schedule. Look for reviews of the tour by previous travelers to get an idea of what to expect.

> RELATED: [20 Questions to Ask Before Booking a Tour](#)

## Sacred Valley Hotels

Many travelers to the Sacred Valley use Cusco as a base, but if you have a little extra time—or if you're worried about the altitude in Cusco—consider staying in the valley instead. Most Sacred Valley hotels are located near Urubamba or Ollantaytambo, with a smaller number clustered in the Pisac area.

One luxurious option is [Inkaterra Hacienda Urubamba](#), which offers spacious hacienda rooms and freestanding casitas overlooking the valley. Elegant touches include stone and wood decor, heated towel racks, and hot-water bottles to keep your bedsheets nice and toasty. Guests can take part in a variety of on-site activities such as birdwatching walks and learning to

make *chicha de jora*, a traditional Inca corn drink.

For a more affordable stay, head to [Hostal Iskay](#) in old-town Ollantaytambo, where the rooms are basic but comfortable and the garden offers views of the town's Inca ruins. Or retreat to [Villa Urubamba](#), where you can stroll through beautifully landscaped grounds and limber up in the on-site yoga room.



**Things You Should Never Pack in Your Suitcase**



**Dangerous Cities You Should Never Tour Alone**



**This Is What Happens to Half-Used Hotel Room Soap**



**10 Flight Attendant Secrets I Wish I Knew Before My Last Flight**



**Why Stealing Hotel Soap is Always a Good Idea**