

DEPARTURES

Travel

How to Explore Machu Picchu, Peru



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A look inside the UNESCO World Heritage site deep in the Andes Mountains.

By S. P. Flynn on May 28, 2018

Considered the ultimate backpackers dream trip, Machu Picchu is the rough-and-tumble trek that's at the top of most adventurers' bucket lists.

A [UNESCO World Heritage Site](#) and one of the New Seven Wonders of the World, Machu Picchu offers a glimpse into the daily life of the Inca's dating back over 500 years. While touring the citadel at Machu Picchu may be the focus of many traveler's trips, there are plenty of other adventures to check out.



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We've put together an itinerary of the best places to stay, what to do, and how to get there, to make the trip a little easier.

Where to Stay

[Sumaq Machu Picchu Hotel](#)

Just on the outskirts of Aguas Calientes, Sumaq Machu Picchu offers the tranquility of a secluded destination, while also being just a few minutes walk to the heart of town. Private terraces offer unobstructed views of Urubamba River and of bustling Aguas Calientes. Each of the 62 spacious suites—starting at 300 square feet—are designed to highlight the beauty of the hotel's surroundings with expansive windows. For exhausted travelers, the hotel offers the only [five-star spa](#) in town with services including facials, full-body massage, and hydrotherapy. *Rooms starting at \$480.*



Courtesy Sumaq

Machu Picchu Hotel

Belmond Sanctuary Lodge

As the only hotel situated adjacent to the ruins of Machu Picchu, there's no better view in town. The 31-room hotel offers unprecedented access to the ruins from atop the mountain allowing guests to soak up the sights long after all other tourists have left for the day. While secluded, the Belmond Sanctuary Lodge offers guests every luxury they'll need for a relaxing stay. *Rooms starting at \$950.*

Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel

Situated on 12 acres of lush grounds, the [Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel](#) offers a remote retreat that's just a few minutes walk to the center of town. This 85-room boutique property offers an array of luxury services including an on-site spa, gourmet restaurant, a tea plantation, and an orchid farm with over 372 species. *Rooms starting at \$434.*

How to Get There

While most catch a [train](#) directly from Cusco, or from the small towns of Urubamba or Ollantaytambo—located in the heart of the [Sacred Valley](#)—others opt for the four-day hike up the Inca Trail. It's a grueling trek but considered a life-changing experience.

[PeruRail](#) and [IncaRail](#) both offer a variety of train options that range from one and a half to three hours long, depending on your departure point. While all of the trains heading to Machu

Picchu are updated with expansive windows and comfortable seating, there is one train that offers a premier luxury experience. Decked out with ornate polished wood and brass finishes, the [Hiram Bingham](#) gives travelers an experience reminiscent of 1920s opulence. The train includes a bar, observatory, gourmet lunch, and entrance to the VIP lounge at the Machu Picchu train station.

For those looking to stock up on souvenirs to bring home, keep in mind that travelers on PeruRail and IncaRail are limited to 17 pounds of luggage for their trip. However, the train stations in Ollantaytambo offer lockers for storage.



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What to Do

Visit the Citadel at Machu Picchu

The 500-year-old UNESCO World Heritage site offers a glimpse into the lost Inca civilization from nearly 8,000 feet above sea level. The beautifully restored ruins are the main draw for travelers heading to Aguas Calientes and there's good reason why. Situated deep in the Andes Mountains, the citadel at Machu Picchu offers insight into a world long gone.

While you can [book your tickets](#) in either Cusco or Aguas Calientes, it would be wise to book them as far in advance as possible. In the summer of 2017, the Peruvian government issued a new set of regulations on travelers visiting Machu Picchu, limiting the number of tickets sold

to 2,500 per day. Tourists are able to visit the site between two time slots; 6 a.m. to noon, and noon to 5:30 p.m.

Hike to the Top of Huayna Picchu

The trek up Huayna Picchu is not for the faint of heart. Soaring an additional 1,200 feet above the ruins of Machu Picchu, Huayna Picchu offers unobstructed views of the citadel and surrounding mountains. The Peruvian government included Huayna Picchu when they instituted their set of restrictions, allowing 400 tourists to visit each day, split between the morning or afternoon time slots. Since the number of tickets are more limited than they are for Machu Picchu, visitors wanting to take this trip need to book their tickets at least three months in advance as they sell out quickly.



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Hike the Inca Trail

For the most immersive experience, adventure seekers choose the four-day trek that starts in Piscacucho, on the outskirts of Cusco, and ends right at the citadel of Machu Picchu. The four-day, three-night trip is physically demanding so you'll need to hire a porter to assist you on your journey. The 28-mile trip gives travelers the most immersive experience with access to a number of other ancient ruins, including Llactapata, Runkurakay, Sayacmarca, Phuyupatamarca and Wiñay Wayna. While it may seem like a daunting task planning such an adventure, there are plenty of tour operators that offer planned itineraries to make the experience as easy as possible.

Stroll Through the Mercado de Artesanias in the Center of Aguas Calientes

The Mercado de Artesanias sits just outside of the rail station's main gate in the center of town. With well over 100 shops, the central market is a labyrinth of brightly colored textiles and Inca-inspired souvenirs. While prices here tend to be a little higher than the souvenir markets in Cusco, many artisans are willing to haggle on price.

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