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Why T+L Readers Have Fallen in Love With This Vibrant South American City

Cailey Rizzo | July 10, 2018

Cuzco, the center of the former Inca Empire, was voted the best city in Central and South America by *Travel + Leisure* readers in this year's World's Best Awards.

Every year for our [World's Best Awards survey](#), T+L [asks readers to weigh in on travel experiences around the globe](#) — to share their opinions on the top cities, islands, cruise ships, spas, airlines, and more. Readers rated cities on their sights and landmarks, culture, cuisine, friendliness, shopping, and overall value.

Although Cuzco is not the capital of Peru (that distinction goes to Lima), it remains a major tourist destination. An estimated 2 million people visit the UNESCO World Heritage site every year on their way to Machu Picchu, about 50 miles up the Sacred Valley.

The town is renowned for its mix of architectural styles and sophisticated urban planning. Wander the cobblestoned streets to the temple of Qorikancha, believed to be built in the 15th century to honor the sun god Inti. Spanish influence is more evident in the Plaza de Armas, the bustling center of colonial city life in Cuzco.

The city sits at an elevation of about 11,200 feet, and visitors may suffer from altitude sickness for the first couple of days. Those who are worried about acclimation can book an oxygen-rich hotel room to combat the effects of the altitude. The [Inkaterra La Casona](#), voted the best city hotel in Central and South America by T+L readers, offers oxygen therapy to help guests adjust to the elevation.

Be sure to stop in a market to get a taste of Peruvian culture. The San Pedro Market is a perfect place to sample delicacies like fresh fruit smoothies, *salchipapas* (fried sausage and potato) or even *anticuchos* (beef hearts). Then pick up a souvenir at the Centro Artesanal. Beautiful Peruvian woven tapestries are always a popular choice.

Adventurous eaters can sit down before a plate of *cuy*, or guinea pig, at a *cuyería*. In Cuzco, the *cuy* is typically roasted and arrives at the table in one piece — head attached. The local delicacy has been served for millennia, although it's not something Peruvians eat on a day-to-day basis. But don't be afraid to try something new — Cuzco is full of out-of-the-ordinary adventures.

Link to story: <https://www.travelandleisure.com/worlds-best/cuzco-peru-best-city-in-south-america>