

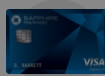
The Best Times to Travel to Machu Picchu

by  Sorrel Moseley-Williams

June 10th, 2019



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Tucked high into the Andes, [in Peru's Sacred Valley](#) at 7,970 feet above sea level, the mysterious Inca citadel of [Machu Picchu](#) is an architecturally breathtaking UNESCO World Heritage Site and absolute South America bucket-list must.

Constructed around 1450, this vital religious, political and administrative center was abandoned some 130 years later when the Inca empire collapsed. While local communities always knew it existed, this lost city was later 'discovered' by the American explorer Hiram Bingham in 1911.

Visitors fly into the city of Cuzco, the empire's former capital that's located at an even loftier 10,954 feet above sea level. It's worth spending a few days acclimatizing to the altitude while exploring its fusion of Inca heritage and colonial buildings before moving on toward the continent's most prominent archaeological site.

Take a bus to the town of Ollantaytambo, a two-and-a-half hour winding drive, and stay in this part of the Sacred Valley to enjoy other gems built by the Inca civilization, such as the Maras salt mines and Moray agricultural ruins. This can help minimize lengthy travel times, which can be exhausting to those unaccustomed to altitude.

Those in pursuit of real adventure hike the Inca Trail. The shortest expedition lasts one to two days and starts at a point known as Km 104, although departing from Km 82 for a four-to-five-day trek is the norm.

The Best Time To Visit Machu Picchu

Leaving directly from Cuzco involves an early, 5:30 a.m. start and a four-hour bus-and-train combo to [Machu Picchu](#) Pueblo (formerly known as Aguas Calientes), a small town located at the foot of the mountain ridge where the ruins lie. Those staying in




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Ollantaytambo take a 90-minute train ride to the same destination. From there, a zigzagging 30-minute bus ride (or walk), your driver's cheek bulging with coca leaves to cope with the altitude, takes you up to the park entrance.

May through September is the dry season and the best moment for stunning photographic memories with this New Wonder of the World, whose official name is Historic Sanctuary — National Archaeological Park of [Machu Picchu](#). Few clouds will likely interfere with a most-wanted shot with Huayna Picchu, the peak at whose feet the citadel lies. May and September are the quietest months for visitors during this period.

The Busiest Time To Visit Machu Picchu

That said, June through August is the busiest period within this winter time frame, when visitors from around the world descend upon the ruins during the northern hemisphere's summer. It's likely that all 5,940 park visitor permits, granted on morning and afternoon schedules, are booked up well ahead of time, meaning you'll shuffle, rather than walk, around the sights such as Temple of the Sun and the Terrace of the Ceremonial Rock.

When to Visit Cuzco For Events

The largest city in Peru's Sacred Valley, Cuzco respects an array of festivals, religious or otherwise. Depending when Easter falls, the Andean version of Carnival is just as vibrant as its Brazilian neighbor's, while Quyllurit'i, held between May and June, is a local celebration of the stars. Inti Raymi honors the Inca sun god Inti, the most respected deity for that culture.

Pachamama Raymi is celebrated every August 1 throughout the Sacred Valley, when communities give thanks to Mother Earth for recent crop harvests and ask her to bless the forthcoming year.

The Best Time to See Wildlife in Machu Picchu

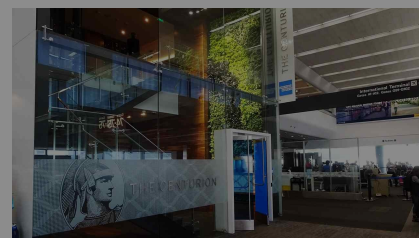
The February-to-April rainy season has its upside and flora fans will adore observing some of the 400 species of orchids that are in full bloom in February and March. Ask your guide to identify the enchantingly named Wakanki and Wiñaywayna, which translate as 'You Will Weep' and 'Forever Young' in the Quechua indigenous language. Guests staying at the Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel can spot 372 different types within the lodge's own gardens. Another benefit to rainy season is that you'll be traveling through lush, green valleys.

Those hiking the Inca Trail should keep an eye out for [Peru's](#) scarlet-hued national bird, the Andean Cock-of-the-Rock, which is one of around 370 bird species observed in the area. Others include the Andean condor and its impressive ten-foot wingspan, as well as an array of zippy hummingbirds. Park visitors will doubtless stumble across a herd of friendly and photogenic llamas.

The Cheapest Time To Visit Machu Picchu

Flights and hotels in Cuzco and the Sacred Valley are at their cheapest between

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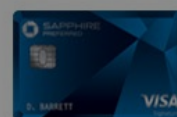
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January and March. Rainy season — which can mean anything from light showers to full-on floods — makes the region less attractive to visit and February is the rainiest month, making it more difficult to traverse the park; it's also when the Inca Trail closes for maintenance.

Carriers flying from Lima to Cuzco include Avianca, LATAM, and Star Perú; budget airlines include Sky and Viva. Plans are afoot to construct an airport closer to [Machu Picchu](#) in nearby Chinchero, despite the area being a no-fly zone, a decision that's currently causing uproar among local communities, archaeologists, and historians.

For more on Machu Picchu and Peru check out these articles:

- [19 Things to Know Before Your First Trip to Peru](#)
- [Travel to Machu Picchu on Points and Miles](#)
- [11 Things to Know Before You Go To Machu Picchu](#)
- [How to See Machu Picchu on a Budget](#)
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