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PERU - JAN 16

How to plan an adventure to Machu Picchu with kids



Amazing Machu Picchu!

Guest post and photos by Tara Cannon, [Pint Size Pilot](#)

For many people, a visit to **Peru's ancient citadel of Machu Picchu** is a must-see bucket list adventure. Constructed in the mid-1400s, this sprawling mountain-top estate is presumed to have been built for **Inca emperor Pachacuti** only to be abandoned a century later during the Spanish Conquest. This **mysterious site** was finally brought to the world's attention in 1911 by **American explorer Hiram Bingham III**, who had been guided there by several local indigenous farmers.

Machu Picchu had been on my travel bucket list for a very long time. My husband and I never managed to make it there as a couple prior to having children (although he hiked **the Inca Trail to Machu Picchu** in his 20s), and then after kids, we decide that we should at least wait until we were through the terrible toddler years. Somehow, without us realizing it, the years just flew by. We finally managed to make the trip happen when the kids were 10 and 12 years respectively, which turned out to be **simply a marvellous age for such a journey** (they could actually point out Peru on a map, could tote their own bags and didn't cry on a dime). For our family, **Machu Picchu was a spectacular adventure** that was well worth the wait. Here's all you need to know about organising **a trip to Machu Picchu with kids**. For more ideas on visiting Peru and [more tips on Machu Picchu](#) take a look at this post by Tara.

Machu Picchu with kids

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Machu Picchu

While Machu Picchu was the main event of our **Peru family vacation**, it was still part of a much larger **Peruvian family adventure** (we spent two weeks exploring the country). Prior to visiting Machu Picchu, we had already spent several days exploring **the bustling megacity of Lima**, had traipsed around **the Peruvian Amazon** and had marveled at **the beauty of the Sacred Valley**. Our itinerary had been so action-packed that I almost had to pinch myself as we stood in line to board the bus for Machu Picchu. Somehow, it had just crept up on me and I could hardly believe that we were about to pass through her gates. By the way, if you're wondering **what Machu Picchu means**, it's translated as "Old Mountain".



Exploring Machu Picchu

The 25 minute bus trip up the mountain to **the gates of Machu Picchu** is a little harrowing, but for those who can stomach looking out the window, the view can be quite spectacular. During the ride, it is hard not to feel the energy of the other passengers who are also clearly trying to harness their excitement.





The highlight for the kids!

Entry to Machu Picchu

As we arrived at **the entrance to Machu Picchu**, our guide helped us to navigate the large crowds — reminding us to visit the washrooms (there aren't any inside), and ensuring that we were not hungry or thirsty. While drinks and snacks are sold outside the gates, you are only allowed to bring water in. We had hired a guide ahead of time through our hotel, but guides can also be hired at the gate for about \$25 USD per person. Note: New regulations from 2017 state **the you must visit Machu Picchu with a guide.**

At Machu Picchu, there are **several circuit options** for making your way through the site (one direction only). There are also two optional climbs that can be done in the mornings only, requiring an add-on ticket. One of them, **Huayna Picchu**, is quite a steep hike and is not suitable for children under 12. **Machu Picchu Mountain**, on the other hand, is a longer, more gradual hike (3 hours) that could potentially be done with fit and active children.

We opted for the basic ticket and upon entry our guide immediately took us up a series of rocky stairs to **a beautiful lookout over the citadel**. Like good tourists, we waited our turn to get **the perfect family Machu Picchu photos**. In my opinion, it was a wise strategy on the part of our guide – allowing us the time to get these photos out of the way early and avoid distraction during the rest of the tour. The only problem with starting from this particular vantage point, was the fact that in addition to the **amazing view of Machu Picchu**, we also had **a perfect view of the llamas** grazing on the grass below. This started what was to become an endless refrain from my children of “When do we get to see the llamas?”. I think it is important to realize that no matter how great your guide is, and how well you have prepared your child for the amazing experience that is Machu Picchu – it is hard to compete with a four-day-old llama.



Llama, Llama

Our **tour of Machu Picchu took about an hour and a half** and I'll admit that with kids, ours was more of an express tour (the tours can run up to three hours). As we had visited **the Inca ruins of Ollantaytambo** in the Sacred Valley the day before, we were able to spend less time talking about the actual method of construction that the Inca used and focus more on the **history and significance of this particular site**. Our guide did a very nice job of pointing out **things that would be of most interest to the kids** — the royal toilet, for example. Outside of marvelling at the incredible construction, it's also quite fun for kids to make their way through the site as it is a bit like winding through a giant maze.

Tip: **Weather can be quite varied at Machu Picchu** and there is almost no cover or shade. Be prepared with sun protection (hat, sunscreen, sunglasses etc.) and a rain jacket (umbrellas are not permitted).

The llamas of Machu Picchu

Now on to the llamas. While we could totally see llamas at a game farm back home in Canada, they seemed **extra special at Machu Picchu**. They drew large crowds both young and old as they tussled, leapt around, and pushed their way down pedestrian paths as if they owned the place. I have absolutely no doubt that they were **what my kids enjoyed most about their visit to Machu Picchu**.



Another llama!

Tips for visiting Machu Picchu with kids

Outside of some of the suggestions already in this post, there are a few other things that are useful to know about visiting Machu Picchu with kids.

- Kids of all ages are welcome at Machu Picchu, but it is probably most suitable for children 6 years and up (lots of walking/lots of talking).
- Children under 8 are free.
- If you are visiting with a baby or toddler, please be aware that strollers are not allowed on the site, but that you are permitted to use a baby carrier.
- Machu Picchu sits at 2430m/7972'. Altitude sickness generally occurs above 2500m/8200' so it should not be an issue at this stop on your trip (although you may experience it in other higher elevations areas of Peru such as Cusco).





Inkaterra Machu Picchu

Staying in Aguas Calientes


Rather than trying to cram Machu Picchu into a day trip from Cusco, (which can be done, but it makes for a long day), we chose to stay **two nights in the town of Aguas Calientes**. While the town is a little touristy, we splurged on a stay at the [Inkaterra Machu Picchu Pueblo Hotel](#). We found this boutique hotel to be an oasis of calm after a busy day exploring the ruins. This unique property occupies 12 flora and fauna filled acres of a former tea plantation and has some very interesting, kid-friendly excursions, including the option to visit their Andean bear conservation project.

There are several dozen other hotels in Aguas Calientes to choose from, several of which are family friendly. For those with the budget, [The Belmond Sanctuary Lodge](#) is the ultimate splurge. This luxury property is the **only hotel right at the gates of Machu Picchu** and gives you the option to just walk out your door and enter the site in the morning, rather than having to queue up for the bus in town like everyone else (with exception to those hiking the Inca Trail). For more hotel ideas near Machu Picchu take a look at these recommendations from [Booking.com](#) and [the best prices and recent reviews from TripAdvisor](#).

Buying your tickets for Machu Picchu

- Purchasing tickets for the train, the bus, and entrance to Machu Picchu can be quite a time consuming and frustrating process. It is much easier to pay a little bit more and use a reputable third party booking company, or to book through your hotel (passport details required either way).
- If you are visiting in the high season of May-Sept, tickets for Machu Picchu can sell out and should be purchased as soon as your plans are set. You must choose to either visit the site from 6am-12pm or from 12pm-5:30pm and there are a set number of visitors allowed in each slot to help try and protect the citadel.
- You can book your tickets through [the official website](#) but, if you want to save time and your sanity then it's well worth [booking through a third party](#).

Bestseller




Machu Picchu and Huayna Picchu Entrance Ticket

🕒 Duration: 1 day

★★★★★

101 Reviews

Likely to sell out



Machu Picchu: Private Full-Day Tour with Afternoon Entrance

🕒 Duration: 1 day

★★★★★

7 Reviews

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Getting to Machu Picchu

Getting to Machu Picchu is a bit involved and generally involves a flight to Cusco, a drive (taxi) through the Sacred Valley, a train ride to the town of Aguas Calientes (also known as Machu Picchu Pueblo), and a short bus ride up to the entrance of Machu Picchu. If you are visiting in peak season (May-Sept), you may have to line up as early as 3:30am for the bus that leaves at 5:30am if you want to reach Machu Picchu for the 6am opening. This was never going to happen for us with kids, so we visited around 10am, which was unfortunately peak time. To avoid the largest crowds (without getting up in the middle of the night), I would recommend a late afternoon visit to the citadel instead, hopping on the bus at around 2pm (the last bus up is at 3:30).

It's worth saying that the train ride up to Aguas Calientes is incredibly beautiful. PeruRail offers the service all day long from the towns of Ollantaytambo and Urubamba in the Sacred Valley. It's worth booking a ticket for the Vistadome car, which has panoramic windows so you can really soak up the views. You can [book your PeruRail tickets here](#).

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Katja

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