

# The Ultimate Itinerary for Visiting Peru During Shoulder Season

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Peru is one of those bucket-list countries. Home to the spectacular Inca citadel of Machu Picchu, one of the Seven Wonders of the World, the Andean nation is also a growing destination for unique culinary experiences and outdoor trekking.

One of the most visited countries in South America, peak season for tourism in Peru is during its dry season, from May to September. With clear skies and milder temperatures, this period offers the best weather conditions for hiking the Inca Trail, visiting the Sacred Valley and exploring the Amazon rainforest.

However, for travelers who don't mind packing a hat and rain jacket, visiting Peru during the rainy season from October to April has significant advantages. The landscapes are lush and green, the crowds at major sites like Machu Picchu are smaller and the rain often comes in short, manageable bursts – typically in the afternoon or evening. This season can offer a more serene, authentic and affordable experience, with lower prices for accommodation and tours.

No matter the season, Peru will always deliver on exceptional dining and hospitality. Each meal tells a story of Peru's rich gastronomic heritage, shaped by extraordinary biodiversity and fascinating agricultural innovations. Visitors can expect modernist takes on ancient ingredients, traditional dishes executed to perfection, and plenty of pisco sours.

## Arriving in Peru

Fly into Lima, the nation's capital and home to over a quarter of its population. Perched on a cliffside overlooking the Pacific Ocean, this vibrant and eclectic city is a place where ancient civilization meets modern urban life. It's also the culinary heart of Latin America, home to some of the continent's most exciting restaurants.

In the historic center of Lima, a UNESCO World Heritage Site, you'll see Spanish colonial-era architecture dating back to the Viceroyalty of Peru, including the famous *balcones de cajón* (box balconies). Inspired by Moorish architectural traditions, these ornately carved wooden structures were designed to provide women of nobility with a view while maintaining privacy.

Plaza de Armas, the city's main square and the heart of the historic district, is home to the Government Palace, the Cathedral of Lima, and the Archbishop's Palace, a testament to the symbol of the city's civic and religious significance. The plaza's centerpiece is a unique bronze fountain, installed in 1650.

While exploring, try street food like choclo con queso (giant Andean corn with cheese), anticucho (beef hearts, skewered and grilled), and picarones (sweet potato donuts) while taking in colorful performances from musicians and dancers.

*Pursuitist Tip: Lima is also home to a variety of museums, including el Museo de Arte de Lima, which houses an expansive collection of art, from pre-Columbian to contemporary – the textiles are a particular highlight.*

## Stay and dine in Miraflores

For the best in hotels, dining and nightlife, look into Miraflores, a beautiful and upscale beachfront neighborhood known for scenic coastal views, expansive beachfront parks and modern shopping centers. Miraflores is also a cultural hub, with art galleries, theaters and the ancient Huaca Pucllana pyramid, a massive structure that predates the Inca empire.

Restaurant options are plentiful. Traditional eateries serve classic dishes like *ceviche* (fresh, lime-cured fish served with sweet potato, shaved red onion, and giant Andean corn), *causa* (fluffy mashed potato layered with chicken or tuna and flavored with lime and aji amarillo), and *lomo saltado* (stir-fried beef with onions and tomatoes served over crispy fried potatoes – this is a fusion dish, influenced by Chinese immigrants).

*Pursuitist Tip: For those looking to get up close and personal with Peru's unique ingredients, local markets like Mercado N° 1 de Surquillo in Miraflores are a must. Browse the curated selection of local artisan goods, organic produce and gourmet foods, or take a guided tour.*

- [Cosme](https://cosme.com.pe/cosme-en/) (<https://cosme.com.pe/cosme-en/>) in Miraflores serves sophisticated Peruvian comfort food in a refined yet casual setting. Recognized as one of the 50 Best Restaurants in Latin America, be sure to try the grilled angus sweetbreads and the transcendent, chocolatey lucuma fondant for dessert.
- [Urban Kitchen](https://urbankitchen.pe/) (<https://urbankitchen.pe/>) is a hands-on dining experience where you'll learn how to cook classic Peruvian dishes using traditional ingredients, sharing in the creation of a fabulous meal
- [Rosa Nautica](https://larosanautica.com/) (<https://larosanautica.com/>), has been around since the 1980s and remains a beloved destination for elegant waterfront dining. Specializing in seafood, this restaurant offers refined take on authentic ingredients. Go at sunset for a truly magical experience.
- [Hotel Pullman Lima Miraflores](https://www.pullmanlimamiraflores.pe/en/) (<https://www.pullmanlimamiraflores.pe/en/>) offers modern amenities and a convenient location.

## Getting to the Sacred Valley

Fly into Cusco, the historic seat of the Inca empire and one of the oldest cities in the Americas. Another UNESCO World Heritage Site, this exceptionally beautiful city is defined by its unique aesthetic blend of classic Inca stonework architecture alongside Spanish colonial buildings against the dramatic backdrop of the Andes mountains. Although significantly smaller than Lima, Cusco is Peru's premier tourism destination, serving as the gateway to the Sacred Valley, a lush agricultural region with the Urubamba River winding its way through towering Andean peaks, and the starting point for any trip to Machu Picchu.

*Pursuitist tip: At an altitude of nearly 11,000 feet, Cusco is higher than Machu Picchu. Start taking altitude medication a few days before heading into the highlands to avoid getting sick.*

Start your exploration at Hacienda Sarapampa

(<http://www.haciendasarapampa.com/about-us/>), a working farm transformed into a luxurious agritourism destination. This beautiful haven offers a unique blend of rural charm and modern comfort, with guided tours from the charming (and fascinating) owners, Maria and Yussef. Learn about the unique agricultural history of the region and experience an intimate farm-to-table meal that highlights hyperlocal ingredients, including the giant corn grown the estate and *patatas morayas*, tubers preserved using ancient freeze-drying techniques.

Venture further into the Sacred Valley to the Salineras de Maras

(<https://www.ticketmachupicchu.com/salineras-maras/>), a striking landscape with more than 3,000 terraced salt pans. Harvested by local communities since pre-Incan times, the salt is actually derived from a subterranean aquifer of ancient

sea water, which flows from inside the mountains. The water is channeled into thousands of shallow pools where it evaporates under the sun, leaving behind crystals of pure sea salt. This traditional method of salt extraction offers a glimpse into ancient practices that have been passed down through generations

Not far from Maras is the [Moray archaeological site](https://www.peru.travel/en/attractions/maras-moray) (<https://www.peru.travel/en/attractions/maras-moray>), home to circular terraces, believed to have been an agricultural laboratory used by the Incas to study the effects of different climatic conditions on crops. These impressive concentric circles create platforms, each with its own microclimate, allowing ancient scientists to experiment and optimize the cultivation of crops like quinoa, corn and potatoes.

The nearby [Mil Restaurant \(https://milcentro.pe/en/\)](https://milcentro.pe/en/) offers an unforgettable, avant-garde dining experience that integrates modern (and post-modern) culinary techniques with traditional Andean ingredients. Opened in 2018 by Virgilio Martínez and Pía León, a married couple behind award-winning restaurants like Kjolle and Central in Lima, Mil specializes in meticulously crafted dishes that showcase the biodiversity of Peru.

Set against the backdrop of the Moray ruins, this unique restaurant not only serves food but also a story with each dish, exploring the heritage and ecosystems of the Andes. Their tasting menu is a journey through altitudes and ecosystems, from the coast to the Amazon, highlighting rare and indigenous ingredients transformed through innovative cooking methods.

And finally, Machu Picchu. Peru's crown jewel, the ancient citadel draws more than a million visitors every year. It's also the attraction with the highest stakes in terms of weather being a deciding factor. During the rainy season, crowds are smaller, but visitors run the risk of having clouds obstructing their panoramic view. But as the weather changes minute-to-minute, the ebb and flow of cloud cover creates an even more magical view. Be sure to take the upper trail routes for the best views of the city. And for those seeking a challenge, the hike up Huayna Picchu provides a bird's eye perspective of the ruins, albeit with steep ascents and a need for a pre-booked spot due to limited access.

Additionally, the rain brings life to Peru's rivers, which makes the already-spectacular vistadome train ride to Machu Picchu particularly exciting. The only other option for transport to the citadel is hiking. Trails may be more challenging during this time year, but the beauty and tranquility of the season makes for an unforgettable journey through misty highlands.

*Pursuitist tip: Bring mosquito repellent. Don't bring your selfie stick (they're banned).*

As a destination that combines history, culture, nature, and cuisine, Peru has something for every kind of traveler, making it a must-visit location on the South American continent. Whether you're a history enthusiast eager to explore ancient ruins, a foodie in search of unique flavors, or an adventurer seeking thrills in stunning natural settings, Peru promises an unforgettable journey.

- [Inkaterra Hacienda Urubamba](https://www.inkaterra.com/inkaterra/inkaterra-hacienda-urubamba/the-experience/) (<https://www.inkaterra.com/inkaterra/inkaterra-hacienda-urubamba/the-experience/>), offers luxury in an exceptionally beautiful setting, with a great restaurant on site that specializes in locally sourced ingredients. Hotel staff will even make you a hot water bottle at night.
- [Casa Andina Premium Cusco](https://www.casa-andina.com/en/destinations/cusco/hotels/casa-andina-premium-cusco) (<https://www.casa-andina.com/en/destinations/cusco/hotels/casa-andina-premium-cusco>) is a cozy and comfortable hotel, conveniently located in the center of town.
- [Casa Colonial](http://www.vallegastronomico.com/casacolonial) (<http://www.vallegastronomico.com/casacolonial>), in Urubamba is a great choice for traditional dishes.
- [Mil Restaurant](http://www.milcentro.pe/) (<http://www.milcentro.pe/>) offers a unique luxury experience. Try the tasting menu, or spring for the full immersive experience, which includes a tour.
- [MAP Cafe](https://mapcusco.pe/en/services/) (<https://mapcusco.pe/en/services/>) is a tiny, wonderful restaurant located in the central courtyard of the museum of Pre-Columbian Art.

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