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- [ANALYST VOICES](#)
- [OVERVIEW](#)
- [COMPANY NEWS](#)
- [AD HOC ANNOUNCEMENTS](#)
- [VOTING RIGHTS](#)
- [DIRECTORS' DEALINGS](#)
- [PRELIMINARY ANNOUNCEMENT FINANCIAL REPORTS](#)
- [AGM ANNOUNCEMENTS](#)
- [CAPITAL MARKET INFORMATION](#)
- [TOTAL VOTING RIGHTS](#)

You are here: [Home](#) > [Stock Exchange](#) > [Overview](#) > Machu Picchu: The Secret of the Incas in Aguas Calientes ...



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## Machu Picchu: The Secret of the Incas in Aguas Calientes, Peru

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Discover Machu Picchu, the legendary Inca fortress in Aguas Calientes, Peru. This UNESCO World Heritage Site captivates with its mystical architecture and breathtaking location high in the Andes – a must-see for every traveler.



Machu Picchu, Aguas Calientes, Peru, Inca - Photo: THN

## Machu Picchu: A landmark in Aguas Calientes

Machu Picchu, the iconic Inca city in the Peruvian Andes near Aguas Calientes, is considered one of the Seven Wonders of the Modern World. This high-altitude fortress, surrounded by mist-shrouded mountain peaks, embodies the genius of Inca architecture

and its profound connection to nature. Built in the 15th century, the site remained hidden from the world until its rediscovery by Hiram Bingham in 1911 and now fascinates millions of visitors annually.

Machu Picchu's unique location on a rocky promontory overlooking the Urubamba Valley makes it a symbol of Peruvian history. In Aguas Calientes, the starting point for the climb, life pulsates with tourists and local vendors. Here, the mystique of the past blends with the vibrancy of the present, making Machu Picchu an unforgettable destination in Peru.

What makes Machu Picchu so special is not only its preservation, but also the spiritual aura emanating from the precisely hewn stones and the views of the surrounding mountains. It is a place that raises questions: Was it a religious site, a royal residence, or an astronomical observatory? These mysteries invite exploration.

*By Dr. Lena Vogel · Travel Editor — As a passionate Andean traveler and cultural journalist, she has been reporting on hidden treasures of South America for AD HOC NEWS for 15 years.*

## History and significance of Machu Picchu

The history of Machu Picchu dates back to the 15th century, when the Inca ruler Pachacuti Yupanqui had the city built around 1450. This period marked the height of the Inca Empire, which stretched from Ecuador to Chile. Machu Picchu likely served as a retreat for the Inca elite and as a religious center where priests performed rituals in honor of the sun goddess Inti.

After the Spanish conquest of Peru in the 16th century, the site was abandoned and swallowed by jungle vegetation. It remained unknown until 1911, when the American historian Hiram Bingham rediscovered it. His expeditions brought Machu Picchu international fame, and in 1983 it was declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Today, it stands as a testament to the engineering prowess of the Inca, who fitted enormous stones together perfectly without mortar.

The significance of Machu Picchu extends beyond its architecture: it symbolizes the resistance of indigenous cultures against colonization and the revival of Peruvian identity. Over a million tourists visit the site annually, making it a cornerstone of Peruvian tourism. In Aguas Calientes, this significance is reflected in the numerous museums and shops that keep Inca history alive.

Archaeological finds such as mummies, ceramics, and gold objects underscore the high level of Inca culture. Bingham transported many artifacts to the USA, a move that has sparked controversy. Peru is demanding their return in order to fully possess its heritage. Such debates highlight the global significance of Machu Picchu.

## Architecture, art and special features

The architecture of Machu Picchu is a masterpiece of Inca engineering. The city comprises approximately 200 structures, including temples, dwellings, and terraced fields, seamlessly integrated into the mountain landscape. The famous polygonal stone walls, where blocks weighing up to 20 tons are stacked without mortar, have withstood earthquakes for centuries – a testament to precise geometry and knowledge of seismics.



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Highlights include the Intihuatana (Sun Shrine), a monolithic stone that served as an astronomical instrument for determining the solstices. The Temple of the Three Windows, with its trapezoidal niches, displays exquisite craftsmanship and symbolizes Inca cosmology. The agricultural terraces, which irrigate steep slopes, demonstrate sustainable farming methods that remain a model to this day.

The reliefs and sculptures depicting deities and animals are artistically fascinating. The burial site of the Inca treasures, including the "Virgin of Machu Picchu," reveals a rich textile and goldsmithing tradition. Visitors marvel at the acupuncture stone pathways, which were transported without wheels or draft animals – a puzzle of Inca logistics.

The integration with nature is unique: llamas graze freely among the ruins, and condors circle above the peaks. Huayna Picchu, the neighboring mountain, offers a challenging climb with panoramic views of Machu Picchu. These features make every visit a journey back in time.

### Visitor information: Experience Machu Picchu in Aguas Calientes

Machu Picchu lies approximately 2,430 meters above sea level in the Cusco region of Peru and is accessible from Aguas Calientes. The only access is via the scenic narrow-gauge railway from Ollantaytambo or Poroy to Aguas Calientes, the base camp at the foot of the mountain. From there, a bus takes you up winding roads to the site – a 30-minute ride with breathtaking views.

Current opening hours and admission prices are available directly from Machu Picchu. Tickets must be booked online in advance through official Peruvian authorities, as visitor numbers are limited to 2,500 per day to protect the site. Guided tours are recommended to unlock the secrets of the ruins.

Practical tips: Wear comfortable shoes for the rocky trails, sunscreen, and a hat to protect against the intense high-altitude radiation. Water and snacks are allowed, but plastic waste is prohibited. Climbing Huayna Picchu requires separate tickets and good physical condition – only 400 places are available daily. In Aguas Calientes, you'll find accommodations ranging from hostels to luxury hotels and Peruvian cuisine such as ceviche or llama steak.

The best time to visit is during the dry season from May to October, when mist clouds make for dramatic photos. Avoid the rainy season from November to March. Sustainable tourism is crucial: stay on marked trails and respect the llamas.

### Why Machu Picchu is a must-see for Aguas Calientes travelers

Machu Picchu is more than a ruin – it's a transformative experience. The moment the sun rises over the mountains and the stones gleam golden fills you with awe. In Aguas Calientes, you can prepare for this highlight, with hot springs for relaxation after the trek.



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Nearby attractions like the Sacred Valley with Pisac and Ollantaytambo complement the trip. Mandor Waterfalls or the Inca Trail for multi-day hikes offer variety. The atmosphere in Aguas Calientes, with street performers and Inca markets, makes the stay thoroughly enriching.

For adventurers, the Salkantay Trek beckons, a more challenging alternative to the Inca Trail. Families enjoy guided tours with stories for children. Everyone will find their reason to visit: culture, nature, or pure inspiration. Machu Picchu changes your perspective on the world.

## Machu Picchu on social media – moods & trends

Machu Picchu is also discussed, explored, and visually shared on social networks. Instead of image elements, the following social media block is deliberately presented as an elegant HTML/CSS map with clear thematic sections.

Mood and reactions

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To fully grasp the fascination of Machu Picchu, a deeper look into its mystical aspects is worthwhile. Many visitors report an energetic presence reminiscent of ancient legends. The Inca believed in Pachamama, the Earth Mother, and built Machu Picchu in harmony with the Earth's ley lines. Modern esotericists make pilgrimages here for meditation.

The flora and fauna enrich the visit: orchids bloom in hidden corners, hummingbirds buzz around, and the Andean bear is rarely seen. Guides share anecdotes about sacred plants like coca leaves, which are said to help with altitude sickness. In Aguas Calientes, you can experience authentic festivals like Inti Raymi, the Sun Festival in June, with its dances and offerings.

Foodies will find Peruvian fusion cuisine: try quinoa salads or anticuchos in local restaurants. Hotels like the **Inkaterra** Machu Picchu Pueblo offer luxury with private terraces. Budget travelers can find posadas overlooking the Urubamba River. Nights in Aguas Calientes are magical, with starry skies over the mountains.

Trip planning begins in Cusco, the former Inca capital. A Sacred Valley tour leads to the salineras of Maras and Moray, circular terraces used for experimental agriculture. The panoramic PeruRail or Inca Rail trains offer glass roofs for epic views. At the destination, an adrenaline-pumping bus shuttle awaits.