Tour Code
EP10

ADVENTURESABROAD

ECUADOR & PERU

Andes, Galapagos, Cuzco & Machu Picchu

22 days

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Day 1 Arrival in Quito

Welcome to Ecuador, where the equatorial sun bathes ancient volcanic peaks and the spirit of adventure beckons from every cobblestone street. We arrive in Quito, Ecuador's captivating capital, perched dramatically at 2,788m (9,200 ft) against the imposing backdrop of Pichincha Volcano.

This evening, as we settle into our hotel and gather with fellow travellers for our first meal together, we're embracing a city that has stood sentinel over the Andes for centuries. Quito's name derives from the Quitu people, who first established settlements here long before the Inca empire extended its reach northward.

Overnight in Quito

Included Meal(s): Dinner

Day 2 Quito: City Tour

We step into the cobblestone streets of Old Quito this morning, entering a UNESCO World Heritage Site where Spanish colonial ambition created one of South America's most magnificent architectural treasures. Founded in 1534 on the ruins of an important Inca city, Quito became the artistic heart of the Spanish empire in the New World.

At the commanding Legislative Palace, elaborate murals chronicle Ecuador's tumultuous journey from indigenous kingdoms through colonial rule to independence. We discover the cathedral where Ecuador's founding fathers planned revolution, and stand in Independence Plaza where liberty was first declared in 1809—ten years before the rest of South America followed.

San Francisco Church astounds us with its massive scale and intricate stonework, but La Compania church truly takes our breath away. Here, Jesuit architects created what many consider the most ornate religious building in the Americas, with every surface covered in gold leaf that required seven tons of precious metal. The baroque facade alone took 160 years to complete, representing the accumulated wealth of an entire continent flowing through colonial Quito.

We then ascend Panecillo Hill, where the towering Virgin of the Apocalypse spreads her wings 45m (148 ft) above the city. From this vantage point, Quito spreads below us like a living map, with the snow-capped peaks of the Andes forming a magnificent amphitheatre around this remarkable capital.

This afternoon, we journey 22km (14 mi) north to the Equator line monument, where we stand with one foot in each hemisphere. The on-site ethnographic museum reveals Ecuador's incredible diversity—a country where 14 distinct indigenous nations maintain their unique languages, traditions, and worldviews.

Overnight in Quito

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 3 Quito - Otavalo Valley - Ibarra

We journey north today into the Otavalo Valley, where the threads of history weave together indigenous resistance, Spanish colonialism, and modern economic success into a story unlike anywhere else in South America.

In the 14th century, when Inca expansion reached northward, the fierce Caraquis people inhabited these fertile valleys. For 17 years, these defiant warriors resisted Inca subjugation in battles that became legendary throughout the empire. The Spanish arrival brought different chains—a hacienda system forcing Otavalenos into 15-hour weaving shifts that nearly destroyed their culture.

But the Otavalenos transformed oppression into opportunity. Today, their weaving tradition forms the foundation of a lucrative industry that

has allowed indigenous peoples to join the global economy while proudly maintaining their traditional values, language, and distinctive dress. We visit a traditional adobe home where guinea pigs—considered a delicacy for over 5,000 years—still scurry around the kitchen, representing one of the Andes' original sources of protein.

In Otavalo city, we wander through some of South America's most vibrant handicraft markets, where textiles in brilliant colours display techniques perfected over centuries. The quality and artistry evident in every weaving, carving, and piece of jewellery reflects a culture that refused to disappear.

Our hosteria near colonial Ibarra provides views of this "White City," so named for its red-tiled, whitewashed houses that climb the hillsides at 2,121m (7,000 ft). Founded in 1606, Ibarra has survived earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and revolutions while maintaining its dignified colonial character.

Overnight in Ibarra

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 4 Ibarra - Avenue of Volcanoes & Cotopaxi - La Cienega

Today we follow in the footsteps of the German scientist, Alexander von Humboldt, and rediscover what in 1802 he called the "Avenue of Volcanoes," a 325 km (202 mi) long valley between the major cordillera ranges. Massive and standing alone, the volcanoes provide brooding, snow-covered contrast to the green equatorial lushness. We see snow-capped summits, mystical brooks and rivers, terraced farmlands, small villages and fascinating cultures.

We'll take the Pan-American Highway southwards and take a side road to discover the impressive volcanism, flora, and bird-life that the Cotopaxi national park protects. Whilst in the national park, we will visit to the Interpretation Center and the Limpiopungo Lake and also complete a short hike that will let us enjoy this natural wonder.

The area is also home to a number of exceptional haciendas, some of which date back to the 16th century. La Cienega Hacienda is located near the village of Lasso near the foot of Cotopaxi and has been witness to centuries of important events in the history of Ecuador.

Overnight at Hosteria La Cienega (Lasso area).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 5 La Cienega - Pillaro - Banos

Today we continue our journey to Banos. We will make a stop in Pillaro where we will visit a traditional workshop of masks that are used in the Pillaro Devil parade, an important cultural expression of the local indigenous people.

We arrive in Banos, a small town whose elevation gives it an extremely agreeable climate and the surrounding mountainsides are brilliant green against the white summit of the Volcano Tungurahua. The word Banos means "baths" and, as the name indicates, the highlight is the numerous hot spring baths in the area.

Today we have opportunity to visit the hot springs as well as wander the streets and market of this picturesque town. You can also hike into the nearby hillsides, along farmers' donkey trails through fields of corn, passion-fruit, and various other local products. A must-see is the Basilica dedicated to the Virgin of the Holy Water, credited with performing many miracles in the Banos area.

Overnight in Banos.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 6 Banos - Devil's Bowl - Riobamba

Before departing Banos, we witness one of South America's most impressive waterfalls—the Devil's Bowl, where the Pastaza River plunges

through a narrow gorge with thunderous power. The waterfall's name reflects indigenous beliefs that such dramatic natural features serve as portals between the physical and spiritual worlds.

At El Manto de la Novia (Bridal Veil Falls), we experience a cable car ride over the Pastaza River Canyon, suspended above roaring rapids that have carved their path through solid rock for millennia. The sensation of flying through this dramatic landscape provides perspective on the incredible forces that continue shaping the Andes.

After lunch, we travel through rolling farmland that flows over the high ridges of the Western Andes toward Riobamba, situated at 2,750m (9,035 ft). This charming Andean city, with its colonial architecture and cobblestone streets, serves as the gateway to Ecuador's highest peaks, including Chimborazo—the point on Earth's surface closest to the sun due to our planet's equatorial bulge.

Riobamba's impressive plazas and fascinating markets buzz with activity from indigenous people dressed in traditional clothing, creating a living museum where ancient customs continue alongside modern life. The Monasterio de las Conceptas and other colonial buildings reflect the city's importance during Spanish rule, when it served as a crucial stop on the royal road connecting Quito with Peru.

The city's small-town atmosphere intensifies as evening approaches, with the surrounding peaks creating a natural amphitheatre that makes Riobamba feel both protected and dramatically exposed to the raw power of the Andes.

Overnight in Riobamba

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 7 Riobamba - Ingapirca - Cuenca

Today our journey continues by road to Cuenca, detouring to visit the Archaeological Complex of Ingapirca, the best-preserved and most important Inca site in Ecuador. Though not on the same scale as, say, Machu Picchu, the ruins include a large oval construction once used for ritual and astronomical purposes. Just outside the ruins, the Museo Sitio de Ingapirca displays a skeleton, tools, and other artifacts recovered from the area. We'll also visit a local market, see the first church established in Ecuador, tour the historic town of Alausi, and enjoy views of Devils Nose Mountain.

Once the site of an Inca settlement, Cuenca today is considered Ecuador's most beautiful city. Its historical connection with Spain is marked by narrow cobblestone streets, quaint parks, and romantic plazas. Charming adobe houses, wrought iron balconies, and religious art treasures capture the spirit of centuries long past. Cuenca, almost hidden away in a southern valley, was isolated until recent times; it wasn't until 1960 that paved roads were built to Quito and Guayaquil. Today's Cuenca is surrounded by small villages whose citizens create intricately detailed jewelry, beautiful ceramics, and masterfully-designed hand-woven shawls.

You'll have time to wander the quaint streets in the compact centre of this charming town before reconvening for our evening meal.

Overnight in Cuenca.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 8 Cuenca: Walking Tour & Museo del Banco Central

We begin our leisurely walking tour at Parque Calderon, Cuenca's main plaza, where the rhythms of daily life unfold as they have for centuries. The old Cathedral, renovated for Pope John Paul II's 1985 visit, showcases the religious art that made colonial Cuenca famous throughout the Spanish empire.

We explore the Monastery of El Carmen and visit La Inmaculada Concepcion while strolling cobbled streets that echo with centuries of footsteps. Every corner reveals architectural details that reflect the wealth flowing through colonial trade routes—carved stone facades, intricate ironwork balconies, and courtyards designed around Spanish ideals of beauty and status.

This afternoon, we visit the Museo del Banco Central, where black and white photographs capture 19th and early 20th-century Cuenca in remarkable detail. The archaeological pieces and ethnographic dioramas reveal layers of history, from pre-Columbian indigenous cultures through Spanish colonisation to modern Ecuador.

We also visit a Panama hat factory, discovering the fascinating story behind these world-famous hats that actually originated in Ecuador. In

1835, Spanish entrepreneur Manuel Alfaro arrived in Guayaquil and recognised the economic potential of toquilla straw hats. He established production chains from straw plantations to weaver networks, exporting his hats through Panama—which was becoming an important centre for international trade.

Overnight in Cuenca

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 9 Cuenca: At Leisure

Today belongs entirely to you in this enchanting UNESCO World Heritage city that Travel and Leisure magazine once named the best place in the world to retire. More than 8,000 US and Canadian citizens have made Cuenca their home, drawn by its perfect climate, low cost of living, and the timeless beauty of its colonial architecture.

Cuenca's compact historic centre invites wandering, with each street revealing new architectural treasures and hidden courtyards. The city's four rivers—the Tomebamba, Yanuncay, Tarqui, and Machangara—create natural boundaries that frame different neighbourhoods, each with its own character and history.

You might visit additional museums, explore local markets where vendors still speak Kichwa alongside Spanish, or simply find a plaza café where you can watch daily life unfold at its unhurried pace. The surrounding mountains create microclimates that keep temperatures comfortable year-round, making every day perfect for exploration.
Many travellers use this free time to purchase local crafts directly from artisans, understanding that every purchase supports traditional skills passed down through generations.

This is your day to absorb the rhythms of a city that has successfully balanced preservation with progress, creating a living museum where past and present coexist in remarkable harmony.

Overnight in Cuenca (due to the informal nature of the day, and for a break from the group meal dynamic, we don't include your evening meal today)

Included Meal(s): Breakfast

Day 10 Cuenca - Cajas National Park - Guayaquil

Today we travel by road to Guayaquil via Cajas National Park.

The park contains hundreds of clear, cold lakes, streams, and rivers. Weather-permitting (which can be highly changeable at this altitude), the park can provide an excellent opportunity for us to hike the grassland of Paramo Region or visit a forest of polelypsis trees, the highest altitude tree in the world. Recently the park's management introduced llamas and alpacas as part of a breeding program to re-introduce these animals to the southern highlands. Keep your eyes peeled for the many bird species that make the park their home, especially for the silhouette of a soaring (and extremely rare) Andean Condor, which can sometimes be spotted here riding the thermal up-drafts.

We continue our descent toward the coast, stopping at a cocoa plantation to learn about cultivation and production of Ecuadorian chocolate, considered among the world's finest due to unique soil conditions and traditional fermentation techniques.

Our destination is Guayaquil, Ecuador's main port city and gateway to both Pacific beaches and the Galapagos Islands. Stretching along the Guayas River, the waterfront Simon Bolivar promenade showcases La Rotonda monument, celebrating the historic meeting between South America's great liberators.

Overnight in Guayaquil.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 11 Guayaquil - Fly to the Galapagos / San Cristobal Airport

Today you will say farewell to your Tour Leader and depart from Guayaquil to San Cristobal on a 2-hour flight. Upon arrival, passengers are picked up at the airport by our naturalist guides and taken on a ten-minute bus drive to the pier to board the M/V Galapagos Legend.

An archipelago of 12 large and several hundred smaller volcanic islands occupying a 4800 sq km (3,000 sq mile) area about 1000 km (620 miles) west of Ecuador, the Galapagos Islands have become one of the world's premier adventure travel destinations. Over the course of your visit, you'll enjoy up-close views of unusual, specially-adapted animals, plants and terrains including sea lions, tortoises, iguanas, land and sea birds, volcanic landscapes, unusual cacti and vegetation. Little has changed about the islands since Charles Darwin's visit in 1835 to "this little world within itself" inspired his first theories of evolution. Nearly the entire archipelago is a natural sanctuary where you'll have thrilling encounters with some of the world's last completely untamed wildlife that has never learned to fear the presence of humans.

We will be navigating the Galapagos on board the M/V Galapagos Legend, a 110-passenger luxury expedition ship totally converted in 2001 and recently renovated. The M/V Galapagos Legend has all-new passenger accommodations with 1800 sq m of social areas and was built with marine certified materials qualifying with Safety of Life at Sea specifications. All cabins are booked in "outside" Junior Suite cabins with plenty of space for luggage in the wardrobe closet. Private bathrooms feature hot and cold water, shower, and a hair dryer. Also aboard, a highly-trained crew, 24 hour physician, and naturalist multilingual guides. An auditorium for conferences, spacious social areas, dining room, 24 hour coffee bar, swimming pool and sun decks, observation platforms, cocktail bars, long distance calls, fully air-conditioned.

AFTERNOON - Interpretation Center & Tijeretas Hill (San Cristobal Island)

Dry landing (no need to step into water upon landing). The interpretation center is full of interesting information and offers the perfect overview to the formation of Galapagos, its significance in the world, threats and conservation efforts. Followed by a hike to Frigatebird Hill (Cerro Tijeretas) we will have great looks at both species of frigatebird, with the bonus of a beautiful view of the bay below.

Difficulty level: easy /moderate
Type of terrain: flat/stairs/rocky
Duration: 1-hour visit/1-hour walk

Return to ship for passenger welcome and briefing; there is a presentation of the crew. At this time a safety drill is practiced. Free time on board. After dinner a guide's briefing on next day activities in the auditorium.

* The cruise portion of this itinerary has been provided provided by the cruise operator and should be taken as guidance only. Last minute operation considerations and national park policies can result in alterations and deviations from this schedule, sometimes at late notice. Such changes are the prerogative of the cruise operator over which Adventures Abroad has no control.

Overnight Galapagos Cruise.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 12 Galapagos Cruise / Gardner Bay, Gardner & Osborn Islets (EspaÃ±ola Island)

Wet landing (you will have to step into shallow water and walk to shore - see your pre-trip notes for suggestions re footwear). One of the most stunning beaches in all of Galapagos, the long, white, sandy beach, lapped by turquoise waters is home to a colony of Galapagos sea lions, indifferent to the humans that walk amongst them. The Hood mockingbirds, endemic to this particular island, will be eager to inspect the visitors and satisfy their innate curiosity. Darwin's finches may also join the throng including the reclusive warbler finch. We can also snorkel here from the beach, in the shallows of the bay.

Difficulty level: easy
Type of terrain: sandy
Duration: 1-hour walk / 1-hour snorkeling

Return to ship; lunch.

PM – Suarez Point (Española Island)

Dry landing. One of the highlight visits of the trip. Punta Suarez seems to have everything – a naturalist's paradise. A slew of marine iguanas and sea lions greet us at the landing site from where our walk continues with close encounters of boobies, endemic lizards, gulls and even a dramatic blow hole. The oldest extant island in the archipelago it is our only opportunity to commune with the endemic waved albatross during their breeding season between April and December. With luck, we can watch their complex courtship display.

Difficulty level: demanding

Type of terrain: rocky
Duration: 2½-hour walk

Return to ship; Free time on board. Guides briefing on next day activities.

Overnight Galapagos cruise.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 13 Galapagos Cruise / Floreana Island

Wet landing. A very short walk from the beach leads us to the famous Post Office Barrel. Claimed to have been first setup in 1793 by Captain James Colnett it remains the oldest functioning "post office" in the Pacific. The system was that whalers and fur sealers would leave addressed letters in the barrel to be picked up by homeward bound colleagues. In the spirit of maintaining tradition visitors today will often take letters and hand-deliver them in their home countries.

Difficulty level: easy
Type of terrain: sandy
Duration: 30-minute walk / 1-hour snorkeling

Return on board, lunch.

PM – Cormorant Point / Devil's Crown / Champion (Floreana Island)

Wet landing. On arriving, the observant visitor will notice that olivine, a volcanic crystal, has proffered a subtle green hue on the dark beach. Our walk takes us past island-endemic Scalesia plants to a large, shallow, lagoon often inhabited by a variable number of shockingly pink greater flamingoes. We continue through a forest of palo santo trees to arrive at a powdery white beach, a nesting area of green turtles. As we paddle barefoot in the shallow water we will spot diamond stingrays and white-tipped reef sharks.This coral-sand beach marks the end of our trail, and we head back to the olivine beach we landed on, to swim or snorkel amongst sea turtles, reef fish, sea lions and, on a good day, white-tipped reef sharks. A small colony of penguins resides on Floreana and can sometimes be observed as well.

One of the favorite snorkeling sites in the islands. Devil's Crown, an eroded volcanic cone, is home to an abundance of fish and marine animals. We will swim with big schools of yellow-tailed surgeonfish, salemas and creole fish and with luck may spot turtles, spotted eagle rays, parrotfish, and even hammerhead sharks! The jagged ëcrowní is a roosting area for boobies, noddies, tropicbirds, and frigates.

A truly magical place to snorkel. We would expect to see here green turtles, harmless white-tipped reef sharks, an impressive diversity and abundance of fish as well as some playful sea lions often approaching very close, itching to show off their prowess in the water. Champion Islet also happens to be the last remaining home of the island-endemic Floreana mockingbird which we may be lucky enough to see from our pangas.

Difficulty level: easy
Type of terrain: sandy & flat
Duration: 1-hour walk / 1-hour snorkeling

Overnight Galapagos cruise.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 14 Galapagos Cruise / Dragon Hill & Punta Bowditch (Santa Cruz Island)

AM Dragon Hill

Arriving to a small lava dock our first encounters are with matine iguanas that belnd in with the dark rock. As we walk past large prickly pear cacti we arrive at one end of a long sickle-shaped beach with Dragon Hill standing in the distance. Our walk takes up o a circular path, past a shallow lake where flamigoes come to drink. Waders such as stilts, turnstones, and sandpipers work the muddy edges frenetrically looking for food as we continue inland to a dry, forested habitat where iguanas rest and burrow.

Difficulty level: moderate
Type of terrain: rocky
Duration: 2-hour walk

PM Punta Bowditch

Feel the indescribable feeling of being were no one else has. Relax on a powdery beach, snorkel around turquoise water islets and hike beside salt pools and dried white corals.

Difficulty level: easy
Type of terrain: sandy
Duration: 30-min walk/one hour snorkelling

Overnight Galapagos cruise.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast, Lunch and Dinner

Day 15 Galapagos: Carrion Point (Santa Cruz Island), Ecuador - Lima, Peru

AM – Carrion Point (Santa Cruz Island)

Dinghy ride at the entry of the Itabaca channel in a lagoon with turquoise water, where we can observe sharks, blue footed boobies, and different kinds of fish.

Difficulty level: easy
Type of terrain: none
Duration: 1 hour dinghy ride

Baltra Airport

After the visit, passengers will be transferred to the airport for our flight back to mainland Ecuador (Quito or Guayaquil). You will then check in for your onward flight to Lima, Peru. Due to flight times, you will likely arrive late in the evening and therefore dinner will be on your own in the airport or on the plane.

In recent years, this city has undergone some wonderful restorations of the plazas, ornate facades, and wooden balconies for which it is famous. Named the 'City of Kings' by the Spanish Conquistadors, Lima is the capital of Peru. Founded in 1535 by Francisco Pizarro, where the River Rimac meets the Pacific Ocean, this was the most important Spanish city during the colonial era with a population of about 100,000 inhabitants. Today the city is home to more than 7 million people.

Overnight in Lima (Miraflores).

* PLEASE NOTE: As an exception to our general policy regarding the inclusion of tips in our tour pricing, gratuities for the ship's crew are NOT included in tour price. (We have found that trying to pre-pay tips on your behalf is not practical, for a number of reasons). Accordingly, we suggest that you allow approximately USD 125 total per passenger for satisfactory service.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast

Day 16 Lima: City Tour

Few cities wear their contradictions as openly as Lima. Skyscrapers in Miraflores look out over mud-brick pyramids that predate the Inca by a thousand years; Spanish baroque cathedrals rise from stones the conquistadors stripped from earlier temples. Today's tour traces that long, layered story.

The day begins in the Historic Center, a UNESCO World Heritage district where the Plaza de Armas is framed by the Government Palace, the Municipality, and the Cathedral of Lima — its interior a centuries-long conversation between ambition, earthquake, and repair. Nearby, the Convent of Santo Domingo offers a quieter counterpoint: a handsome colonial complex holding the relics of three Peruvian saints, its cloisters a refuge from the plaza's bustle.

The afternoon shifts registers. In the residential district of Pueblo Libre, the Larco Museum occupies a graceful 18th-century viceregal mansion built — in a satisfying irony — atop a pre-Columbian pyramid. The collection spans more than 3,000 years of Andean civilization, from exquisite goldwork to ceremonial ceramics of extraordinary refinement.

The day closes at Huaca Pucllana, a massive adobe pyramid rising improbably from a quiet Miraflores neighbourhood. Built by the Lima Culture around 400 CE — centuries before the Inca — it served as a ceremonial centre for a civilization most visitors have never heard of. Standing at its base as the modern city hums around it, the full arc of the day comes into focus: Lima isn't a colonial city with an indigenous past. It's an ancient city that a colonial chapter happened to inhabit.

Overnight in Lima.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 17 Lima - Fly to Cuzco - Urubamba Valley - Ollantaytambo - Yucay

Early this morning we fly to Cuzco, located in a fertile valley at 3354 m (11,004 feet). This is the archaeological capital of the Americas and the ancient capital of the Inca Empire that, at its height, stretched from Colombia in the north, through Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia, and down to central Chile in the south. Although the empire already existed in the 12th century, it remained small until the mid-15th century. Over the next 100 years, it expanded massively but declined due to the civil war and the conquest by the Spanish conquistadors under Francisco Pizarro in 1533.

On arrival we will travel by road into the Urubamba Valley, or "Sacred Valley of the Incas," along one of the most scenic drives on our trip, to the Inca ruins of Ollantaytambo located on a spectacular ridge with deep valleys on either side. We can admire the carefully constructed and maintained farming terraces on the surrounding hillsides.

We continue to the town of Yucay on the bank of the Urubamba River (2300m / 7,590 ft). This is an attractive little town of particularly fertile lands whose name translated into Spanish means "deceit" or "bewitchment". According to legend, in the middle of the 15th century, the Inca Huayna Capac was captivated by the incomparable magnificence of Yucay's setting and decided to settle here.

Overnight in Yucay.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 18 Yucay - Machu Picchu Area

Today we take the early morning train* from Urubamba to Aguas Calientes and Machu Picchu. The train journey to Machu Picchu is a highlight of any trip to the Andes; the scenery is simply spectacular, and the train allows you to enjoy it in comfort. The +/- 3 hour trip takes us through a changing landscape with wonderful vistas of the mountains and, deep in its dramatic canyon, the beautiful Urubamba River. Light snacks and beverages are included on board. Our early arrival from Urubamba ensures that we are at the site before the tourist throngs arrive on the train from Cuzco later in the morning.

Machu Picchu, popularly known as the 'Lost City of the Incas,' is an ancient city of stone palaces, towers, temples and staircases. It is a very mysterious place, and to this day our knowledge of it remains sketchy. There are no records or artifacts on the site to indicate what any of the buildings were used for. Archaeologists have ascertained that the site was most likely a ceremonial centre and possibly used for administrative purposes for the populous region.

Upon arrival at the Aguas Calientes train station, we will have the opportunity to pick up a packed lunch before a bus takes us on the 6 km (4 mile) twisting journey up the mountainside to the site of Machu Picchu. Having already dropped our baggage at our hotel, we proceed immediately for our timed entrance and 2.5-hour guided walking tour.** During this guided exploration we will visit the central and lower areas of the citadel, home to Machu Picchu's most iconic sections, including the Temple of the Sun, the Temple of the Three Windows, and the residential area. This route offers beautiful views with Huayna Picchu mountain in the background—perfect for memorable photos—and is quieter with fewer steps, allowing us to take our time and appreciate the site's historical and architectural details.

Following our guided tour, you'll have the opportunity to continue exploring the site on our own for several additional hours. It's important to note that the site operates on a one-way circuit system—visitors cannot backtrack or re-enter previous areas, and park guards actively manage visitor flow to ensure a smooth experience for all. After spending the afternoon soaking in the extraordinary atmosphere of this

mountaintop sanctuary, we return by bus to Aguas Calientes.

* PLEASE bring an overnight bag for this one night at Aguas Calientes as the train enforces strict luggage limits. Our larger bags will be transported back to Cuzco for us. Please also note that, due to group size limits, groups exceeding 15 participants will be split between two guides for today's site tour.

** Machu Picchu ticketing is managed directly by the government authorities and is beyond the control of Adventures Abroad. While we will do everything in our power to confirm exactly which circuit we will be completing as a group well in advance, this may not be confirmed until closer to your chosen tour start date.

Overnight at Agua Calientes (near Machu Picchu).

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 19 Machu Picchu Area - Cuzco

A large part of the beauty of Machu Picchu is created by its setting on a mountain top surrounded by deep valleys. By staying for a second day to visit Machu Picchu, rather than visiting as a day trip from Cuzco, we are able to savour the atmosphere of this very special place.

In the early morning of our second day at Machu Picchu, some group members may choose to take the bus back up to the site with the weather-dependent hope of seeing the mist-clad mountains greet the morning sun (an optional excursion).* Weather notwithstanding, the best thing about going up the second day is being there early when there are fewer people, allowing time to "soak it in," as well as the opportunity to climb Huayna Picchu.

During our time in the village below the site, we will also include a visit to the Manuel Chavez Ballon Site Museum, which focuses on the "discovery," excavation, and history of Macchu Picchu. On display are historical photos, including photos of Hiram Bingham at Machu Picchu shortly after he came across the ruins, informative write-ups on the construction of Machu Picchu and the life of the Incas, and artifacts found at the site. Outside the museum is a very lush botanical garden running along the river; some plants are labelled and there are a few short trails. This is a nice shady area to rest on a hot day and is an easy 25 minute walk from Aguas Calientes down the road leading to Machu Picchu.

Later in the afternoon we board the VISTADOME train from Aguas Calientes to Ollantaytambo Station (1.5 hours) from where we bus back to Cuzco.

* Due to strict limits on the number of visitors daily, if you elect to visit again today (optional - at your expense), you will need to book well advance. Full details will be included in your pre-trip info package provided at time of booking.

Overnight in Cuzco.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 20 Cuzco Area Touring

Today we enjoy a combined half-day excursion visiting some of the most important Inca sites in the Cuzco area along with key landmarks in the city itself.

Sacsayhuaman is an impressive complex which, like so many others of that time, had both a religious and military purpose. The fortress known as the 'storehouse of the sun' incorporates some of the largest stones ever used in a building. The zig-zag walls represent the teeth of the sacred puma and provide an excellent defensive structure. The stones fit so perfectly together without mortar that not even moss can grow in the cracks!

We also visit Coricancha, the temple of the sun which was the most important location in the Inca empire. Entombed in the closed cloister of the Sto Domingo Church, these sacred walls were hidden from modern civilization until the colonial walls were brought down in 1950 by a powerful earthquake. We visit the church of San Blas with its fabulously carved pulpit. Wandering the narrow streets of the San Blas artisan region we make our way to the cathedral which towers impressively over the Plaza Mayor. Inside we find precious paintings from the Cuzco School of Art, one of the most prolific of its era.

This Inca city was laid out around a great central square in the shape of a puma, the god of lightning. Today, stone walls built by the Incas line most of Cuzco's central streets and form the foundations of colonial and modern buildings. The Inca buildings were so well built that the Spaniards simply knocked down the upper parts of the Inca temples and palaces and built their churches and mansions on top of the Inca walls. Shortly after the Spanish conquest, the capital was moved to Lima on the coast. Thus Cuzco has retained a wonderful, untouched colonial atmosphere. The culture is also very much alive here, and is evident in the music, clothing and handicrafts of the people.

Our excursion concludes by early afternoon. We have dinner at a local restaurant where we can try some typical Peruvian dishes. One may wish to try the "Pisco sour", a powerful drink made with a Peruvian liquor distilled from white grapes.

Overnight in Cuzco.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 21 Cuzco & Pisac

This morning we visit the ruins at Tambo Machay, Puca Pucara and Qenko. The latter is an Inca sacrificial site carved with inscriptions.

We continue to Pisac with its lively market where you will encounter traditionally dressed locals with whom you can barter for colourful craft items. You will see many unique Andean musical instruments as well as dazzling textiles. Peruvian woolen items are justifiably famous for their imaginative designs, based on Inca art and the local flora and fauna. You can buy sweaters and caps made from the extremely warm wool of alpacas and llamas.

We return to Cuzco with balance of the day at leisure.

Overnight in Cuzco.

Included Meal(s): Breakfast and Dinner

Day 22 Departure

Departure from Cuzco.

BUEN VIAJE!

Included Meal(s): Breakfast